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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

CONFLICT OR COOPERATION?
BLACKFOOT TRADE STRATEGIES, 1794-1815

BY

THEODORE BINNEMA

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 1992

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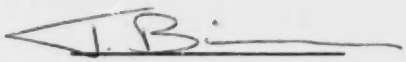

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ABSTRACT

The Blackfoot (Siksika) had access to European goods through Cree and Assiniboine middlemen beginning in the 1720s, but when they began trading directly with Company traders in the 1780s and 1790s, their mutually beneficial relationship with the Cree and Assiniboine gradually deteriorated. Although the Blackfoot had improved access to European goods in the era of direct trade, the Cree and Assiniboine continued to have more secure access to such goods than other people in the region. On the other hand, as long as the Indians to the south and west of the Blackfoot had uncertain access to European military hardware, the Blackfoot enjoyed military supremacy over them. Under these conditions, the maintenance of access to European goods became a matter of critical importance to the Blackfoot.

Between 1794 and 1814 two preeminent leaders among the Blackfoot led groups of affiliated residential bands. Each group followed its own strategy which was aimed at maintaining access to European goods. The first group, led by Feathers (also known as Painted Feather), sought to secure its position through an accommodating policy toward traders and Indian groups it would meet at trading posts. By maintaining congenial relations with neighbouring Indians and with traders, Feathers's band had exceptionally secure access to European goods. Feathers's band camped near fur trade posts and acted as plains provisioners. Amicable relations with traders even encouraged fur trade companies to establish Chesterfield House well within Blackfoot territory. At Chesterfield House, members of Feathers's band acted in a homeguard role.

The second group, led by Big Man, or Gros Blanc, pursued a much more confrontational policy toward traders and neighbouring Indians. Traders and neighbouring Indians viewed this band with suspicion. However, the band came to trading posts relatively infrequently. For much of the year it made little contact with traders or neighbouring Indians. Nevertheless, through intimidation, theft and plunder, this band also appears to have met its desires for European goods.

These bands did not value friendly relations with Indians to their south or west, or with American trappers, because they did not perceive any advantage in such friendships.

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NAMES OF INDIAN GROUPS USED IN THIS STUDY

The names used to refer to Indian peoples vary in historical documents and in secondary literature. In order to clarify their use in this work, the names of Indian peoples used in this study are given below, followed by other names which commonly appear in primary sources and secondary literature.

Arapaho:	Tattood Indians
Assiniboine:	Assiniboin, Stone or Stoney Indians, Stoney Mountain Indians
Atsina:	Gros Ventre, Big Bellies, Fall or Water Fall Indians, Rapid Indians
Blackfoot:	Blackfoot proper, Blackfeet, Siksika
Blackfoot Confederacy:	Slave Indians, Blackfoot, Blackfeet, Archithinue, Earchethinue
Blood:	Bloody, Kainah
Cree:	Southern, Southerd or Southward
Crow:	Crow Mountain Indians
Flathead:	Salish, Saleesh
Kootenay:	Kutenai, Kootanae, Cotton a
Peigan:	Pikuni, Piegan, Muddy River Indians, Missouri River Indians, variations of Pekanow, Piedgans, Pahkee, Peeagan
Sarcee:	Sarsi, Sussews
Shoshoni:	Snake, Shoshone

NAMES OF INDIVIDUAL INDIANS USED IN THIS STUDY

The names of several Blackfoot individuals appear in historical documents. This study will argue that traders of the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and the North West Company (NWC) used several different names to refer to two principal men. The text refers to each man according to the name which appears in the relevant source. In the interest of clarity, the following list shows the Blackfoot name of each man, followed by an approximate English translation of the name, and the names which the author believes refer to the same man.

Ak ko makki (Old Swan): HBC--Feathers, the Feathers, the Feather
NWC--Painted Feather

O mok a pee (Big Man): HBC--Big Man, Fatt Man, Fat man
NWC--Gros Blanc, the Gros Blanc

INTRODUCTION

By the 1780s, when fur trade companies were establishing posts along the North Saskatchewan River on the edge of Blackfoot territory, guns already had a significant impact on life on the western plains. Beginning in the late 1720s several Plains Indian groups including the Blackfoot acquired a few guns and the requisite ammunition in friendly trade with Cree and Assiniboine middlemen. According to Peigan chief, Saukamappee (Young Man), possession of guns gave the Blackfoot the important military advantage they needed to pressure their Shoshoni enemies southwest toward, and eventually over, the Rocky Mountains.[1] During the 1780s and the 1790s competing fur trade companies established posts farther up the North Saskatchewan River, and Plains Indians began trading directly with company traders rather than with Cree and Assiniboine brokers.

This direct trade brought significant changes to life on the western Plains. The most obvious change was a gradual deterioration in Cree and Assiniboine relations with their former Plains Indian trading partners. The Cree lost their role as middlemen in the fur trade. Instead of relying on wolf and fox skins traded from Plains Indians in order to acquire European goods, the Cree and Assiniboine had to turn elsewhere. Increasingly these Cree and Assiniboine bands pushed onto the parkland and plains. Here, they found plentiful buffalo and beaver resources for trade and subsistence. As they pushed into areas long used by Blackfoot bands, their relationship with the Blackfoot became increasingly competitive.

As the relationship deteriorated, secure access to horses and guns

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[1]Richard Glover, ed. *David Thompson's Narrative: 1784-1812* (Toronto: Champlain Society (vol. 40), 1962), 240-248. Duncan M'Gillivray also believed that Blackfoot possession of guns had given them the ability to dominate more southerly nations, A. S. Morton, ed., *The Journal of Duncan M'Gillivray of the North West Company at Fort George on the Saskatchewan, 1794-5* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), 47. Also see Frank Raymond Secoy, *Changing Military Patterns of the Great Plains*, American Ethnological Society Monographs, No. XXI (1953), 52.

became more important to both peoples. Blackfoot access to horses was secure. They acquired most of their horses by raiding the large herds of the Shoshoni, Flathead and Crow, or through natural increase. For the Cree and Assiniboine, horses were much more difficult to acquire. Mortality among horses was higher in the colder and snowier Cree and Assiniboine lands. Raids against the Blackfoot became a major source of horses for the Cree--and a major irritant in Cree-Blackfoot relations.

Secure access to guns and ammunition would be problematic for the Blackfoot. On one hand, direct trade increased their ability to acquire European goods. Formerly dependent on wolf and fox furs, the Blackfoot could now trade their surplus meat and horses with white traders. Provisions quickly became a Blackfoot trade staple. In addition, the Blackfoot could acquire European goods at a considerably lower cost. In brief, for the Blackfoot, direct trade created a market for their surplus products and provided them with lower-cost European goods.

Access to trading posts became increasingly difficult for the Blackfoot. As Cree bands pushed south and west, Blackfoot bands found access to the North Saskatchewan River posts increasingly problematic, particularly during periods of Cree-Blackfoot hostility. Although the traders were relatively powerless to influence these developments, both the Cree and the Blackfoot often perceived the traders as being in league with their enemies. In this way the traders also became entangled in Plains conflicts.

Guns were not new to the Blackfoot in 1780, but direct trade was, and it dramatically changed life for the Blackfoot. The need to secure regular access to guns and ammunition, especially in light of increasingly hostile relations with the Cree and Assiniboine, and the increased opportunities for the Blackfoot in the trade led to a split within the Blackfoot bands between 1794 and 1814. The split seems to have arisen out of a disagreement over the best strategy to adopt in relations with the traders and neighbouring Indians. Between 1794 and

1814 the debate resulted in a political division of the Blackfoot into two groups of affiliated bands.

Feathers, the leader of one band and a shrewd tactician and diplomat, emphasized an accommodating and cooperative policy toward European traders and neighbouring Indians. While this strategy called for an intense involvement with traders and in the fur trade, it was apparently aimed at ensuring Blackfoot access to European goods. Big Man, a mercurial and short-tempered chief, well known as a courageous warrior, took a more confrontational and aggressive stance toward the traders and neighbouring Indians in an effort that would appear to have maximized Blackfoot self-reliance and prestige and minimized entanglements and commitments.

This study deals specifically with the Blackfoot bands. Unfortunately, some terms used to describe or identify the Blackfoot, including the term "Blackfoot", are inexact, inaccurate or misleading. In its broadest application the term "Blackfoot" has been used to refer to the Peigan, Blood, Blackfoot, Atsina and Sarcee collectively. These five Plains Indian groups frequently found themselves fighting common enemies, but the reader should be aware that there were significant cultural and linguistic differences among some of these Indians . More commonly the word "Blackfoot" is meant to include the so-called Blackfoot Confederacy: the Pikuni (Peigan), Kainah (Blood), and Siksika (Blackfoot). These three groups share a common history, language and way of life. It is possible that they once formed one entity. The term "Blackfoot Confederacy" however, is problematic because it may imply that the Siksika (Blackfoot) were the largest, most powerful or leading group among the three. This was not the case. Furthermore, the three did not form a confederacy in the most commonly perceived political sense of the word. While relations among them were generally peaceful, and war parties were often composed of members of the three groups, they lacked any shared political organization or leadership.

Interestingly, the term "Blackfoot Confederacy" was not used by traders in the Canadian fur trade before 1815. They used the word "Blackfoot" to refer to the Siksika bands specifically. The term "Blackfoot" is a translation of the word "Siksika"; therefore the most correct application of the term "Blackfoot" is to the "Siksika" bands. Before 1815 Hudson's Bay Company and North West Company traders recognized the Peigan, Blood and Blackfoot as separate entities even though they knew that these three groups, unlike the Sarcee and Atsina, shared a common culture. The tendency to group the Peigan, Blood and Blackfoot together under the name "Blackfoot" apparently developed in the American fur trade, and in the later Canadian fur trade.[2] Nevertheless, this term remains in use, and in this study the term "Blackfoot Confederacy" refers to the Peigan, Blood and Blackfoot collectively, with the assumption that the reader will be aware of the inadequacies of this term. The term "Blackfoot" will refer to the Siksika specifically. These Blackfoot bands are the focus of this study.

The term "Slave Indian" as it appears in both Hudson Bay Company and North West Company documents, can be ambiguous. As early as the 1720s the Cree conducted "Archithinue" to Hudson's Bay. The Cree word, a disparaging word for neighbouring Indians, was often translated as "Slave Indians". The Cree tended to use the term contemptuously for several Indian groups. This explains why some Athapaskan-speaking Indians of northern Alberta are known as Slave or Slavey Indians.[3] The

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[2]Lynda Gullason, "The Fort George-Buckingham House Site Plantation (1792-1800): Native-European Contact in the Fur Trade Era" (M. A. Thesis, Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1990), 52; John C. Ewers, *The Blackfeet, Raiders on the Northwestern Plains* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 51; Alexander Phillip Maximillian (Prince of Wied-Nieuwied) "Travels in the Interior of North America" in Rueben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Early Western Travels, 1784-1897* (Cleveland: A. Clark, 1904-1907), 23: 96.

[3]Diamond Jenness, *The Indians of Canada* (Ottawa: National Museum, 1972), 389.

term "Slave Indians" when encountered in documents can be problematic because traders sometimes applied it to the Blackfoot Confederacy specifically, and sometimes to all Plains Indians.[4]

Historians have not always recognized the important role of Indians in the history of the fur trade. Until 1960, Canadian historians had a tendency to see native history as tangential to the history of Canada. Even full-length fur trade histories gave natives only cursory treatment.[5] Historical literature seemed to include the assumption that European contact and the fur trade led to a rapid disintegration of native culture, and that European products were so superior to aboriginal technology that natives quickly abandoned their own tools and became dependent on trade goods.[6]

This view has undergone considerable revision in the last three decades. Arthur J. Ray's *Indians in the Fur Trade* has been particularly important in this revision. Ray found that Indians had not been naive, overwhelmed victims of the fur trade but that they had participated in the fur trade skilfully and intelligently as partners in a trade which

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[4]Susan Gianettino, "The Middleman Role in the Fur Trade: Its Influence on Interethnic Relations in the Saskatchewan-Missouri Plains," *The Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 7 (1977): 27-28. Henday used "Archithinue" to refer to Indians aside from the Blackfoot Confederacy while Henry used "Slave" to refer to the Blackfoot Confederacy only. M'Gillivray used the term even in reference to the Shoshoni. Because he used the term rarely, Fidler's usage is unclear. Laurence J. Burpee, ed., "York Factory to the Blackfoot Country: The Journal of Anthony Henday, 1754-1755", *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Series 3, vol. 1 (1907), Section 2: 316, 339-344; Elliot Coues, *New Light on the Early History of the Greater Northwest: The Manuscript Journals of Alexander Henry [the Younger], Fur Trader of the North West Company and of David Thompson, 1799-1814.* vol 2. (Minneapolis: Ross & Haines, 1965), reprinted from (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1897), 523; Morton, 47.

[5]See E. E. Rich, *The History of the Hudson's Bay Company 1670-1870*, 3 vols. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1960) and Harold A. Innis, *The Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History.* Revised Edition, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

[6]E. E. Rich, *The Fur Trade and the Northwest to 1857* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 102-103.

had many benefits for both Indian and European.[7] In this way Ray encouraged historical research into many aspects of the native experience in the fur trade.

The trade histories written in the past three decades have been aimed at a better understanding of the role which Indian peoples have played in fur trade history. They confirm that the history of the fur trade cannot be adequately understood without consideration of the various Indian groups involved. Naturally, most of these studies are focussed on native groups that had the most intense relationship with traders. Particularly relevant to this study is the literature on the Cree.[8] This literature has asked more new questions than it has answered. It has confirmed that Indians had a significant role in fur trade history, but leaves historians with the question of the role taken by individual Indian leaders and bands. While it established that the Indians were important to fur trade history, it suggests that historians may have overestimated the impact of Europeans on native history. What forces within Indian societies and between Indian peoples influenced their response to company traders and to fur trade opportunities? Indians with a "peripheral" role in the fur trade were usually at a military disadvantage as opposed to Cree and Assiniboine bands which had a central role. What tactics did such peoples use to mitigate the effects of these disadvantages?

Unfortunately, there is little literature on individual Indians in the fur trade. Blackfoot leaders such as Crowfoot and Red Crow and other native leaders such as Poundmaker, Big Bear and Sitting Bull are

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[7]See Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Hunters, Trappers and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay: 1660-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), xi.

[8]See John S. Milloy, *The Plains Cree; Trade, Diplomacy and War 1790 to 1870* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 1988) and Paul C. Thistle, *Indian-European Trade Relations in the Lower Saskatchewan River Region to 1840* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba, 1986).

topics of monographs.[9] These men were leaders at the time of treaty negotiations--a much later and very different era in native history. Brief examinations of leaders among the Blackfoot Confederacy as early as 1830 exist, but they cannot give a satisfactory understanding of the role which leaders and bands played during the early fur trade.[10] Documentary information about Indian leaders and bands before 1815 is by no means complete, yet it is sufficient to provide an impression of the critical role they played in influencing the role their people played in the fur trade.

The location of trading posts and the importance of European weapons inevitably complicated and altered political and economic relationships among Indian bands and between Blackfoot bands and all neighbouring Indian groups; however, traders often exerted little influence on these developments. Traders appear to have reacted to these changes, but did not direct them to any significant degree. Indians with a "peripheral" role in the fur trade, whether they be Atsina, Blackfoot, Blood or Peigan, adopted various strategies in order to minimize their disadvantages in relation to the Cree and Assiniboine, and to maximize their advantages over Indians who had no access to European goods.

There is little historical literature on the Blackfoot involvement in the Canadian fur trade. Much of the literature on the Blackfoot--most of which was written by ethnologists--deals with questions of

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[9]Hugh A. Dempsey, *Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfeet* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972); Hugh A. Dempsey, *Red Crow, Warrior Chief* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980); Hugh A. Dempsey, *Big Bear: The End of Freedom* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984); Donald C. Barnett, *Poundmaker* (Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1976); Norma Sluman, *Poundmaker* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1967); and Stanley Vestal, *Sitting Bull: Champion of the Sioux: A Biography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1932).

[10]Hugh A. Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye", *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Francess G. Halpenny, ed., vol. VIII, Toronto, 1985, and Hugh A. Dempsey, "History and Identification of Blood Bands" in *Plains Indian Studies* Douglas H. Ubelaker and Herman J. Viola eds., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1982).

particular ethnological interest, such as the impact of the horse on Blackfoot culture, or is centred on a later era, an era for which ethnologists have been able to carry out field work. The small body of literature dealing with the Blackfoot involvement in the fur trade deals mostly with the American trade after 1830. For many years scholars had very limited access to most documents relating to the Blackfoot in the Canadian fur trade. Oscar Lewis's 1942 study of the effects of white contact upon the Blackfoot argued that "the fur trade was the mainspring of Blackfoot cultural change",[11] although he and American ethnologist John C. Ewers, as well as Canadian historian Hugh A. Dempsey have argued that the Blackfoot were less subject to Euro-Canadian influences for a longer period of time than were Indians to the north and east. All would agree that the Blackfoot were able to make their own economic and political decisions free of outside control, at least until the 1830s, and probably several decades longer.[12] As yet however, there has been little discussion of the complex forces which conditioned Blackfoot involvement in the Canadian fur trade.

Unfortunately historical evidence about the Blackfoot before 1815, be it archaeological or documentary, is scant. The harsh climate of the northwestern plains has destroyed most of the fragile artifacts of this nomadic culture, and what remains is difficult to date. Documentary evidence of the period, all of it written by fur trade company employees, is scant, incomplete, and contradictory.

Since Euro-Canadians wrote the documentary materials for commercial purposes, the historian must be aware of their limitations.

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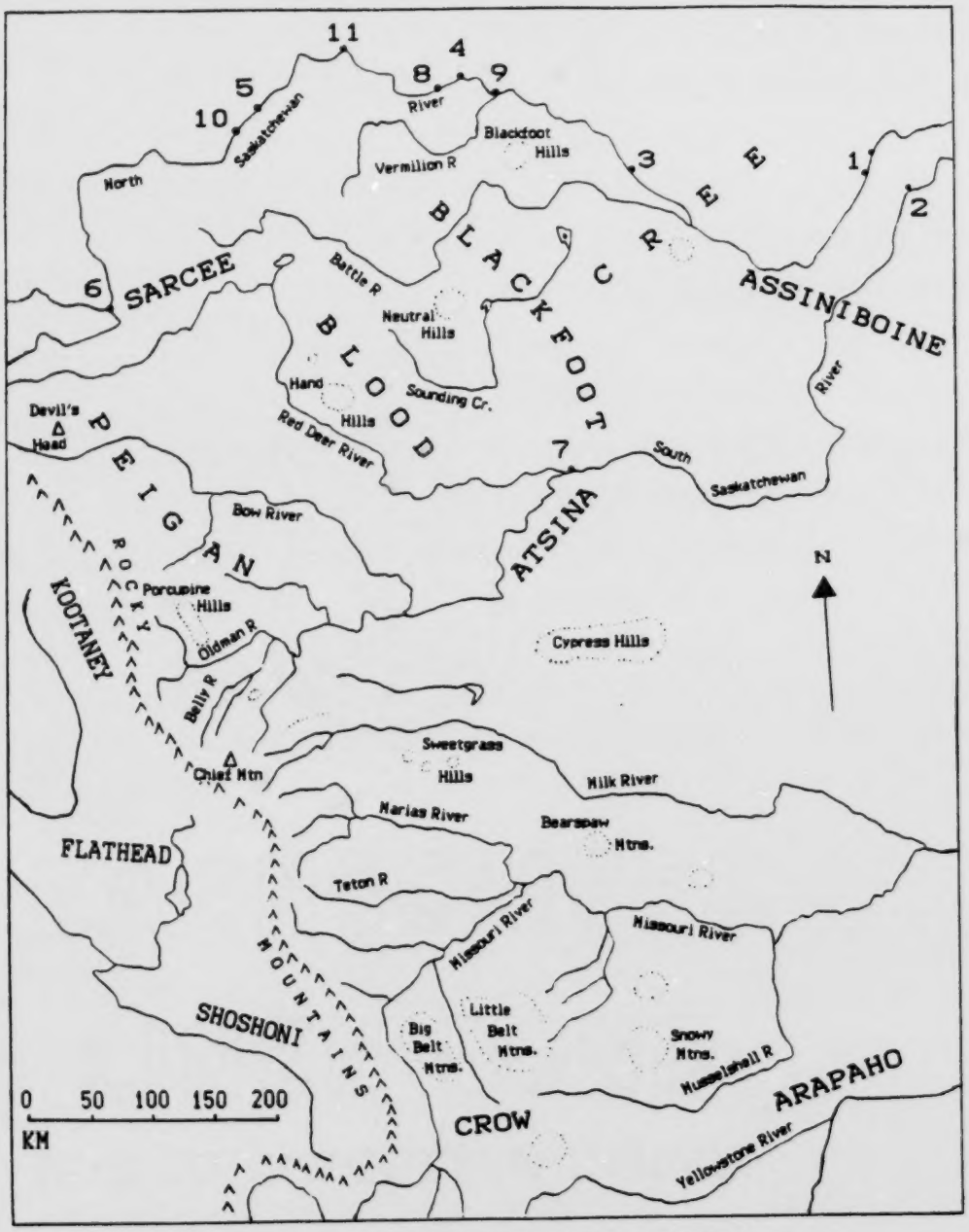
[11]Oscar Lewis, *The Effects of White Contact Upon Blackfoot Culture, With Special Reference to the Role of the Fur Trade* (New York: J. J. Augustus, 1942), 61.

[12]Lewis, 37; Hugh A. Dempsey, "The Blackfoot Indians" in R. Bruce Morrison and C. Roderick Wilson, eds., *Native Peoples: The Canadian Experience* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 427; John C. Ewers, *Indian Life in the Upper Missouri* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1968), xi.

Many traders had a limited understanding of Indian societies. They frequently misunderstood what they saw, and Indians occasionally misled them. They would be more likely to record Indian behaviour that interfered with the trade than that which was routine. Since the documents deal with trade matters, it is easy for the researcher to overestimate the importance of the fur trade in the lives of the Indians. The documents shed little light on the role of women, children or religion in native societies. Significant historical events may not have been recorded because the author did not see the event as having importance to the fur trade. Behaviour which had been going on continuously might suddenly be mentioned in a journal when it became important to the business of the company. For example, the fact that the trade in horses was rarely mentioned in Hudson's Bay Company journals before 1812, but often thereafter, is not so much a sign that the trade in horses suddenly grew, but an indication that this trade assumed new importance to the traders at this time.

This study is focussed on the behaviour of Blackfoot bands and leaders between 1794 and 1814. The earlier date marks the earliest mention of specific Blackfoot leaders in the fur trade documents; the later date denotes a transition in Blackfoot leadership. The lack of detailed documentation poses particular problems. As most of the documents were addressed to company officials in London, many important aspects of the trade were not recorded. Despite their relevance to the daily pursuit of the trade there were factors in which head office officials had little interest. For example, it is clear that individual band leaders were vitally important to the daily conduct of the trade. Nevertheless, the names of individual Indians rarely appear in the documents. Significant information about Blackfoot band behaviour is available only for scattered years between 1794 and 1814.

Although they did so only occasionally European traders began noting names and habits of Blackfoot leading men in 1794, shortly after



MAP 1. LOCATION OF INDIAN GROUPS AND FUR TRADE POSTS, 1794-1814

1.	Hudson Houses (Upper and Lower)	1779-1788
2.	South Branch Houses	c.1785-1794, 1804-1810
3.	Manchester Ho/ Pine Island Fort	c.1785-1794
4.	Fort George/ Buckingham Ho	1792-1801
5.	Fort Edmonton/ Fort Augustus	1795-1802
6.	Rocky Mountain House/ Acton Ho	1799-1875 (intermittently)
7.	Chesterfield House	1800-1802, (1804-05?)
8.	Island Ho/ Fort de l'Isle	1800-1802
9.	Fort Vermilion/ Paint River Ho	c.1802-1810, c.1812-1816
10.	Fort Edmonton/ Fort Augustus	1802-1810, 1812-1913
11.	Fort Edmonton/ White Earth Ho	1810-1812

Main source: Terry Smythe, 'Thematic Study of the Fur Trade.'

the beginning of direct Blackfoot trade in the upper North Saskatchewan River Valley. By 1811, most of the officers who recorded the most valuable information had left the country. The most interesting information was provided by traders who kept journals aside from official company journals. Duncan M'Gillivray's 1794-95 journals, written while M'Gillivray served the Nor'Westers at Fort George, offers crucial information about the Blackfoot in that season.[13] M'Gillivray wrote his journal for the benefit of friends. Thus he may have embellished his stories. However, he wrote his published journal either during his tenure at Fort George or shortly thereafter when the memory of events was still fresh. His journal, and that of Alexander Henry the Younger, provide information from a North West Company perspective. Like M'Gillivray, Henry kept his detailed journal up to date. Furthermore, between 1808 and 1810 he came to know the Blackfoot particularly well. His journals for those years offer much valuable evidence.

Although David Thompson kept journals during his time in the west, his published narrative was written decades later.[14] Naturally his personal journals were a help to him as he wrote his narrative, but obvious errors and contradictions show that his narrative is, indeed, the product of an imperfect memory. Still, it is the best source of information about the history of the Blackfoot Confederacy before the coming of the white man.[15] Records of his stays in Peigan camps offer valuable information about daily life among the bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Although he viewed the natives paternalistically, Thompson

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[13]M'Gillivray's journals are published in Morton.

[14]See J. B. Tyrrell, ed., *David Thompson's Narrative of His Explorations in Western America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: Champlain Society (vol. 12), 1916); Glover; Victor G. Hopwood, ed., *David Thompson: Travels in Western North America, 1784-1812* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1971).

[15]Thompson recorded Saukamappee's accounts of the first Blackfoot Confederacy encounters with horses and guns, Glover, 240-248.

displayed considerable understanding and appreciation for them.

The most important documentation about the Blackfoot in this era is found in Peter Fidler's journals. Fidler was a keen observer and a meticulous and remarkably dispassionate recorder of information. A journal kept during the winter of 1792-93 provides valuable information about his stay with Sakatow's Peigan band.[16] This experience acquainted Fidler with the Blackfoot language and way of life and with leaders of all three Blackfoot peoples. More valuable are Fidler's journals kept at Chesterfield House between 1800 and 1802. These journals provide key information about Blackfoot individuals and bands. Furthermore, three separate journals have survived: a running personal journal which Fidler may have updated several times a day, the official post journal sent to London, and a journal written some time after Fidler left Chesterfield House.[17] A comparison of these journals would help any researcher better understand the content and limitations of official post journals, but the three journals together offer information which is particularly important for this study. Another rough journal exists for the 1796-97 season which Fidler spent at Buckingham House.[18] Clearly these unpublished documents written by a remarkable and prolific recorder, remain under utilized among historians.

Despite their limited usefulness the Hudson's Bay Company post journals have also been under utilized by historians of the Blackfoot. Post journals rarely mention individual Indians by name, but they do

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[16]Hudson's Bay Company Archives, (HBCA) E. 3/2, folios 2-39, "Journal of a Journey over Land from Buckingham House to the Rocky Mountains in 1792 & 3 by Peter Fidler".

[17]Fidler's running journal for 1800-01 is found in HBCA B. 34/a. 1. His running journal for 1801-02 is found in HBCA B. 39/a. 2. The official post journals are found in HBCA B. 34/a. 2-3. His rewritten journal is classified HBCA E. 3/2, folios 62d-72, "Journal from the mouth of the South Branch of the Saskatchewan River to the confluence of the Bad & Red Deers Rivers where Chesterfield House is situated by Peter Fidler, 1800".

[18]HBCA B. 49/a. 27[b], among the Cumberland House Post Journals, 1796-97.

provide valuable information about the Blackfoot. Furthermore, once Blackfoot leaders have been identified in other sources, their identity can occasionally be inferred from descriptions found in post journals. Aside from the Chesterfield House post journals already mentioned, the Buckingham House, Manchester House, Fort Edmonton and Island House journals were used in this study.

In attempting to analyze native leadership, society and history, a scholar enters the realm of ethnohistory. Neither historians nor ethnologists attempt ethnohistorical study without trepidation. While historians in many fields have made greater use of ethnological methodology and data in recent years, for historians ethnohistory is unique in that it depends on historical documents generated by people of one cultural tradition to study the history of a nonliterate people of another cultural tradition. Thus ethnohistorians rely on documents written by historical actors who were not a part of the society under study. Ethnologists (cultural anthropologists) carry out their work through field work among representatives of a society, but they recognize that historical documents can supply evidence which would otherwise be unavailable. Historians prefer to use historical documents which are a product of the society under study, but in particular circumstances are forced to rely on documents produced by outside observers.

This is an historical study. It must make use of anthropological knowledge, and its arguments may be of some interest to ethnologist, but it is oriented to the methods, aims and interests of historians. While historians are in a sense strangers to this field of study, in another sense they are at home in it. Since they are trained evaluators of evidence found in historical documents they ought to be skilled in considering how a writer's purpose and intended audience, and the format and historical context of documents, affect the significance and reliability of the evidence contained in them. Furthermore, as

historians are sensitive to what is of historic importance they should be able to make a useful contribution to the ethnohistorical literature. They seek that which is unique, unusual, and that which indicates change. They are more preoccupied with isolated events and individuals than ethnologists are. Historians concern themselves with discovering the events that constitute the history of a people. For this reason they display a particular sensitivity to time and place.

A close examination of Blackfoot history in the early fur trade reveals dynamic historical change. In the era of indirect trade (1720's to 1780's), the Blackfoot and Cree enjoyed a friendly relationship based on mutual interests. With direct trade came the division of Blackfoot society into two bands reflecting two distinct trade strategies. For some Blackfoot, the opening and closing of Chesterfield House was of great importance. At this post some Blackfoot bands developed a quasi-homeguard role in the fur trade. In the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century, the Blackfoot responded to increasingly hostile relations with their Cree and Assiniboine neighbours, increasingly powerful neighbours to the south and west, and increasingly difficult access to European goods. At no point was there one "Blackfoot response" to these pressures. Two principal men guided different bands along very different courses. The actions of these men, however, must first be placed in historical context.

CHAPTER 1
REPERCUSSIONS OF DIRECT TRADE, 1720-1814

During the late 1720s the Blackfoot Confederacy acquired their first horse and their first gun. Indians in southwestern North America acquired horses via Spanish settlements many years before they procured guns. Conversely, northeastern Indians acquired guns from British and French traders long before they first saw horses.[1] Acquisition of either horses or guns had significant impact on Indian ways of life, but, coupled coterminously as they were with the Blackfoot, the acquisition of the horse and gun had an especially dramatic impact. While anthropologists have long debated the effects of the horse on Blackfoot culture they would agree that the acquisition of the horse stimulated changes in many aspects of Blackfoot life.[2] Bands became larger and much more mobile; the size of tipis grew considerably; buffalo hunting became much easier; and battle strategies and tactics changed dramatically. In order to enjoy the benefits that the horse brought, bands had to consider the availability and security of horse pasturage in deciding camp locations and movements.

As significant as the effects of the gun were on Blackfoot society they can easily be overestimated. When the Blackfoot acquired European goods they simply incorporated them into their way of life. Guns assumed a largely military role for they were not well suited to Blackfoot hunting methods. In 1808, Alexander Henry the Younger reported that the bow and arrow, not guns, were used to kill buffalo.[3] According to John Ewers this was still the case in the middle of the nineteenth century.[4] Even in warfare the Blackfoot did not rely solely

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[1]Secoy, 104-106.

[2]For a useful discussion and bibliography, see John C. Ewers, *The Horse in Blackfoot Indian Culture* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1969), 299-322.

[3]Coues, 530.

[4]Ewers, *The Blackfeet, Raiders*, 77, 84-5.

on guns. They continued to use the bow and arrow and other traditional weapons such as lances, knives and clubs at least until the 1830s.[5] Nevertheless, the gun was a potent military weapon. Between 1730 and 1800 the Blackfoot Confederacy gradually drove the Shoshoni, Flathead and Kootenay from the prairies into the protection of the valleys west of the Rocky Mountains. Thus, the gun became the key to enhanced Blackfoot power and security and provided the means for territorial expansion.[6]

Because of the critical importance of horses and guns the Blackfoot had to ensure an adequate supply of both. Horses were more important in Blackfoot daily life; but guns and ammunition were more difficult to acquire. For this reason from the moment they acquired guns, the behaviour of the Blackfoot Confederacy toward other groups, Indian or European, was conditioned by their need to secure access to guns and ammunition.

From 1730 to 1780 the Blackfoot Confederacy depended on Cree and Assiniboine middlemen as their suppliers of European goods, including guns and ammunition. During this half century the interests of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Cree and Assiniboine complemented each other. In exchange for horses and wolf and fox skins Cree and Assiniboine brokers supplied "secondhand" European goods. These middlemen, in turn, traded their furs at Bayside posts. The Blackfoot had secure access to guns and the middlemen enjoyed access to Blackfoot furs and horses. Not surprisingly the mutually beneficial relationship between these people appears to have been essentially friendly in this

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[5]Ewers, *The Blackfeet, Raiders*, 141-2.

[6]Secoy, 51-2. The smallpox epidemic of 1781-82 which struck the Shoshoni before the Blackfoot Confederacy also appears to have played a part in the Shoshoni withdrawal toward the southwest, Glover, 49, 245-247.

era.[7]

As early as the 1720s some members of the Blackfoot Confederacy visited the Bayside post of York Factory. However, since the Blackfoot Confederacy did not use canoes these were rare visits as they were conducted to the Bay in Cree or Assiniboine canoes. The visits could have been motivated by curiosity about the source of the guns which they had recently acquired from the Cree. But the Blackfoot could not hope to bypass the middlemen Cree. The "Earchethinue" told traders at York Factory that they did not consider the trip to the Bay to be worth their effort.[8] After 1733, they stopped coming to the Bay.[9] Apparently, the Blackfoot could meet their needs adequately by dealing with the Cree. They preferred paying the prices demanded by the Cree and Assiniboine rather than travelling to the Bay themselves.

Hudson's Bay Company officials were more eager to bypass the middlemen than the Blackfoot were. In 1754 they sent Anthony Henday to convince the Plains Indians to bring their trade directly to the Bay. Henday found the "Archithinue" reluctant to visit the Bay.[10] Although visits of the "Archithinue Indians" resumed in 1757, they stopped again in 1766.[11] While at York Factory, one "Archithinue" man told Hudson's Bay Company employee Andrew Graham that the Plains Indians paid fifty beaver or wolf skins for a gun. Despite being told that he could get a gun for fourteen Made Beaver (MB) at York Fort he "generously told me

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[7]Milloy, 31. As was normally the case when Indian groups formed trade relationships, the two peoples developed important kin relations, Glover, 49, 240-1; HBCA E. 3/2, December 29, 1792.

[8]E. E. Rich, ed., *James Isham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1743, and Notes and Observations on a Book Entitled "A Voyage to Hudson's Bay in the Dobbs Galley, 1749"* (Toronto, Champlain Society (vol. 12), 1949), 113.

[9]Ray, *Indians*, 55.

[10]Burpee, "York Factory", 338.

[11]Ray, *Indians*, 55, 61; Glyndwr Williams, ed., *Andrew Graham's Observations on Hudson's Bay, 1767-91* (London, The Hudson's Bay Record Society (vol. 27), 1969), 257.

[Andrew Graham] they never would come down, and that he himself never would come down again, as he did not like to sit in the canoe and be obliged to eat fish and fowl as he had done mostly coming down."[12] Clearly the demand for European goods among the Blackfoot Confederacy was sufficiently modest that they followed what Paul Thistle has described as "the principle of least effort."[13] Under this principle European goods were acquired according to the least effort rather than the lowest price. The Cree likewise, were willing to trade goods with the Blackfoot because it spared them the effort of trapping furs themselves.

The Blackfoot began trading directly with Europeans soon after 1780. However, initial contact with Europeans did not in itself cause significant disruption to the Blackfoot way of life. There is no evidence that the Blackfoot were overwhelmed by Europeans. Furthermore, the smallpox epidemic of 1781, which killed up to half the Blackfoot, was apparently transmitted to them by Indian groups who, in turn, had contracted it from Europeans on the Missouri River. It was not connected with the Hudson's Bay Company or North West Company traders.[14] To be sure alcohol became an important trade item after direct trade began. The negative effects of alcohol on Blackfoot society after 1850 are undeniable. Yet there is no evidence that alcohol consumption disrupted Blackfoot life in any significant way during the era under study.

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[12]Williams, 257. The Made Beaver was a unit of currency equal in value to one prime beaver skin.

[13]Thistle derived his theory that the Cree used the "Zen road to affluence" (principle of least effort) from anthropologist Marshall D. Sahlins, *Stone Age Economics (Chicago, Aldine-Atherton, 1972), 1-39,* Thistle, 23.

[14]Ray, *Indians*, 105-7; Glover, 49, 236; Coues, 722. It seems that the same can be said of outbreaks of smallpox in 1801 and 1837, Alice Johnson, *Saskatchewan River Journals and Correspondence: 1795-1802* (London: Hudson Bay Record Society (vol 26), 1967), 294; Ray, *Indians*, 188-9; C. D. Dollar, "The High Plains Smallpox Epidemic of 1837-38" *The Western Historical Quarterly* VII (1977): 18.

The coming of Euro-Canadians significantly altered political, economic and social relationships on the Plains. Direct trade removed the foundation of Blackfoot-Cree friendship.[15] The Blackfoot ceased to depend on the Cree and Assiniboine for European goods. Having lost their role as middlemen, the Cree were threatened with diminished access to European goods and Blackfoot horses. These Plains Cree and Assiniboine bands could maintain access to European goods by turning to a provisioning role; however, maintaining access to horses was much more difficult. When horses could not be acquired peacefully through trade the Cree and Assiniboine raided the herds of other Plains Indians and of the traders. Cree and Assiniboine horse raids became a primary source of friction between the Cree and Assiniboine, and the Blackfoot bands.[16]

Peace did not break down immediately. It is likely that personal friendships and kin relations helped preserve the peace for a time. Blackfoot relations with the Cree were apparently peaceful until the late 1780s.[17] Bands of Cree camped peacefully along with Peigan, Blood, Blackfoot and Sarcee bands as far south as the Bow River in 1792-93.[18] Even during the summer of 1806 a Cree band camped with a Peigan band near the Rocky Mountains.[19] Not until 1806 did Cree-Blackfoot friendship collapse. As we shall see, from that time on, hostility between the Cree and the Blackfoot Confederacy significantly affected the conduct of the fur trade.

Traders were acutely aware of, and troubled by, friction between

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[15]Milloy, 20-29.

[16]David G. Mandelbaum, *The Plains Cree: An Ethnographic, Historical, and Comparative Study* (Regina: Plains Research Center, 1979), 62; Milloy, 36.

[17]Milloy, 31.

[18]HBCA E. 3/2, January 10, 1793. See also, Ewers, *The Horse*, 24.

[19]HBCA B. 60/a.6, September 22, 1806.

their long-time trading partners and their Plains neighbours. Warfare reduced trade returns significantly, for warring Indian bands could spend little time trapping. Furthermore, warring Indians could attempt to block enemy access to trading posts. Traders attempted to keep peace among the Indians while maintaining neutrality, but as different Indian groups enjoyed unequal access to guns and ammunition, traders could not avoid entanglements. Various Indian groups accused the traders of being in the league with their enemies. For their part the traders had to ensure their own security. From their perspective, Cree access to fur trade posts could not be jeopardized because the traders were far too dependent on the Cree for a wide range of services which no other Indians could be expected to replace. The Blackfoot Confederacy traded wolf and fox furs and provisions but, except for some Peigan bands, they provided few beaver skins. Despite the importance of the provisions trade in the Saskatchewan River region the Blackfoot trade was not highly valued. On the other hand the traders valued the Cree trade.

The Saskatchewan River posts became a major source of pemmican for both companies. In 1808, Alexander Henry estimated that "In the spring we bring down the Saskatchewan to this place [Cumberland House] from 300 to 500 bags of pemmican, and upward of 200 kegs of grease."[20] Each bag of pemmican weighed ninety pounds (about forty kilograms), and represented about 350-440 pounds (about 160-200 kilograms) of fresh buffalo meat.[21] At that time, the North West Company was aggressively moving into the Mackenzie River basin. The pemmican was brought to Cumberland House largely to supply northern brigades. Henry implied that the Hudson's Bay Company brought even more pemmican to Cumberland House than the North West Company did, for he referred to the "superabundant stock of provisions, pemmican, grease, etc., which the H.

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[20]Coues, 475.

[21]Arthur J. Ray, "The Northern Great Plains: Pantry of the Northwestern Fur Trade" *Prairie Forum* 9 (Fall 1984): 271.

B. Co receive annually from the Saskatchewan."[22] In earlier years, the pemmican would have been used to supply the Hudson's Bay Company's northern brigades, but by 1808 much of it apparently went to supply "the wants of the natives, [at posts such as Cumberland House] whose country is wretchedly destitute of game animals."[23] By 1809 the Hudson's Bay Company abandoned the Athabasca region because of its inability to supply enough pemmican to traders in that region.[24] In almost every year between 1795 and 1815 at least some Hudson's Bay Company traders complained that they had difficulty procuring sufficient provisions. This would suggest that Blackfoot provisions should have been highly valued by traders. This does not appear to have been the case.

The North West Company saw Blackfoot trade with relative indifference. After describing the treatment which "Beaver Hunters" were given by North West Company traders at Fort George in 1794, M'Gillivray continued: "but the *Gens du large* [Plains Indians] consisting of Blackfeet, Gros Ventres, Blood Indians, Piedgans &c., are treated with less liberality, their commodities being cheifly [sic] Horses, Wolves, Fat & Pounded meat which are not sought after with such eagerness as the Beaver."[25] Fifteen years later, the North West Company placed no higher value on the trade of the "Slave tribes": "The trade with the Slaves is of very little consequence to us. They kill scarcely any good furs;.... At present our neighbours [Hudson's Bay Company] trade with about two-thirds of the Blackfeet, and I would willingly give up the whole of them."[26] It appears that the North West Company, which captured most of the trade of all the other Indians, found it so easy to

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[22]Coues, 475.

[23]Coues, 475-6.

[24]Ray, "The Northern Great Plains", 269.

[25]Morton, 31.

[26]Coues, 541. Henry consistently used the term "Slave Indians" to refer to the Peigan, Blood and Blackfoot, Coues, 533.

meet its provisions requirements that the value of any Indians' trade was based purely on their beaver production.

The Hudson's Bay Company was not so fortunate. It has been observed that the Hudson's Bay Company had chronic supply problems before 1815. As early as the late 1770s the Hudson's Bay Company was experiencing food shortages at Cumberland House.[27] According to Arthur J. Ray, such shortages quickly led the Hudson's Bay Company to establish posts such as Hudson House along the Saskatchewan River.[28] Ray has suggested that in the period between 1763 and 1821, "in the mixed forest-prairie-steppe area, the provision market became more important than the fur trade."[29] The Hudson's Bay Company's chronic provisions shortage, combined with the fact that this Company was more willing than the North West Company to accept wolf skins, explains why it consistently captured the larger portion of Blackfoot trade.[30]

While the provisions trade was clearly important, provisions were not sought to the exclusion of furs at any Hudson's Bay Company post. Every post in the Saskatchewan River country was an important fur trading post. In fact, the fur returns of several of these posts were very significant. When bands that traditionally supplied furs were found to be pounding buffalo the traders invariably expressed disappointment. Even at Chesterfield House, which was established where expectations of returns in beaver skins could only be modest, Fidler considered a Blackfoot band that was pounding buffalo and supplying meat to the post to be "pittiful".[31] While the traders were often frustrated

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[27]Ray, *Indians*, 126.

[28]Ray, *Indians*, 125-7; Ray, "The Northern Great Plains", 263.

[29]Arthur J. Ray, "The Hudson's Bay Company and Native People" in William C. Sturtevant, ed., *Handbook of North American Indians* vol. 4, *History of Indian-White Relations* Volume edited by Wilcomb E. Washburn. (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1988), 343.

[30]Morton, 41-2; Coues, 541.

[31]HBCA B. 39/a.2, December 25, 1801.

by Cree "idleness" Hudson's Bay Company traders still considered the Cree "the only Indians of real value" in 1808.[32]

There were more fundamental reasons for the traders' commitment to the Cree. From the first meeting of Hudson's Bay Company traders and Cree bands along the shores of Hudson's Bay in 1670, the Cree and the traders began to develop a relationship based on mutual interests. Access to European goods enhanced the life of all trading bands. Over the years some Cree bands developed into "homeguard" bands--bands which provided various services and goods at the Bayside posts in return for goods and services provided by the traders. For example homeguard Indians would hunt geese for the traders during the fall and spring migrations. In return traders would provide food for the Indians during times of scarcity in the winter months. These homeguard were more intensely involved in the fur trade than other Cree bands, and their friendly relationship with the traders was cemented by intermarriage and the growth of kin relations. As Hudson's Bay Company traders began moving inland in 1774 they naturally continued to rely on their Cree friends and kin.

At fur trade posts on the North Saskatchewan, Cree bands continued to act as homeguard Indians. They were paid for a variety of goods and services much as were homeguard bands on Hudson Bay. For example homeguard Indians often acted as guides and couriers. They paddled canoes between Hudson Bay and the Company's inland posts. Some provided birch bark and built canoes. Some were hired periodically as hunters. Such hunters, often accompanied by several company men, would camp some distance from the post and hunt game for the traders. The critical role the Cree played at North Saskatchewan River posts allowed them to use the traders as a base for their own "territorial expansion".

In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, some Cree and Assiniboine had become troublesome horse thieves; however,

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[32]HBCA B. 60/a.7, April 12, 1808.

traders continued to view the Cree and Assiniboine as the only dependable beaver hunters in the North Saskatchewan River region. More importantly, the Saskatchewan-Hayes communication route to York Factory passed through Cree lands. If traders in the upper Saskatchewan River area allied themselves with the Blackfoot rather than the Cree, their relationship with the Cree could be jeopardized. The loss of the Cree alliance would cost traders a critical source of beaver furs, the increasingly important services of homeguard Cree band, and a safe route to Hudson Bay. The traders strove to keep peace among all Indian groups, but when peace was broken, even at the instigation of the Cree and Assiniboine, there would be little incentive for traders to break their relationship with their Cree associates and kin.

No close relationship developed between the Blackfoot and the traders. Few Hudson's Bay Company traders learned the Blackfoot language. Intermarriage between traders and Blackfoot was rare. Furthermore, Plains Indians appear to have intimidated traders. Traders on their part seemed to feel that because of the warlike and aloof behaviour of the Plains Indians, they were untrustworthy.[33]

It is in this context that during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, numerous Cree bands were pushing south through the parkland toward the prairies.[34] Apparently these bands preferred life on the prairies, and since the traders accepted their provisions, the Plains Cree and Assiniboine did not need to depend solely on diminishing beaver stocks. The Cree post hunters and the Plains Cree did not supply sufficient meat for the company--other Plains Indians were still able to trade their provisions. Still, the gradual push of the Plains Cree became another irritant in the deteriorating Cree-

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[33]Sharrock, Susan R, "Cross-Tribal, Ecological Categorization of Far Northern Plains Cree and Assiniboine by Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Fur Traders" *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* VII (1977): 11; Morton, 47-48.

[34]Johnson, 80; Milloy, 27.

Blackfoot relationship. Slowly, the mutually beneficial pre-1780 relationship evolved into post-1800 antagonism.

As long as the Cree and Blackfoot were at peace Cree bands could feel safe south of the North Saskatchewan River and Blackfoot bands could travel safely to trading posts, but when tensions rose, both would feel threatened. As Blackfoot bands centred their activities farther south, the Cree were able to restrict Blackfoot access to North Saskatchewan River posts. When warfare broke out between the Cree and Assiniboine and the Blackfoot in 1806 no trading parties from the Blackfoot Confederacy appeared at Fort Edmonton for almost an entire year.

The Blackfoot may have had uncertain access to European goods at times, but it seems that they had little problem in producing enough trade products to acquire the European goods that they desired. After the 1780s direct trade allowed the Blackfoot to acquire European goods much more cheaply than had been the case earlier. While the Cree had charged as much as fifty MB for a gun the North West Company charged fourteen Beaver at Fort George in 1794.[35] This allowed the Blackfoot the choice of reducing their production while maintaining the same flow of European goods, or increasing production of a wider variety of goods in order to acquire more European goods than had been possible before.

The Blackfoot Confederacy continued to trade significant numbers of wolf and fox furs between 1790 and 1815. These skins were easily acquired. After a wolf had gorged itself on a buffalo carcass it could easily be overtaken by equestrian hunters. The market for wolf and fox furs, however, declined between 1794 and 1814. Because of its long supply routes the North West Company could afford to trade only the highest quality furs. Before 1808 the North West Company had stopped trading wolf furs although in 1813 they were accepting the best quality

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[35]Morton, 30.

wolf skins.[36] The Hudson's Bay Company accepted wolf furs at a rate of one or two skins per Made Beaver.[37] In 1812 Hudson's Bay Company traders were told to refuse wolves although within a year they found this order impossible to follow.[38] The Company found that Plains Indians often refused to bring provisions unless their wolves were accepted as well.

While demand for wolf skins was falling, the traders' demand for provisions gradually increased. Since the number of buffalo killed in a buffalo drive was nearly impossible to control, the number killed often exceeded the immediate needs of a band. In some cases only the favourite parts of the best quality cow buffalo were used.[39] Fur traders formed a ready market for some of the excess meat.

Traders desired meat in two forms: fresh and dried. Provisioning Indians supplied fresh meat in winter. Fresh meat was consumed by post personnel over the course of the next season or was rendered into pemmican. As the number of fur traders in the Saskatchewan River Valley increased so did the demand for fresh meat. The market for dried meat also grew over the years. When big game occasionally became scarce in particular forest areas posts in these regions looked to the prairie posts to supply them with the necessary provisions.[40] Also, limited by the short summer season and the size of their canoes, canoe brigades could neither afford to hunt food along their way nor carry a sufficient supply in their canoes. Pemmican, a form of preserved buffalo meat which could be kept indefinitely, was used to resupply canoe brigades.

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[36]Coues, 541; HBCA B. 60/a.12, October 8, 1813.

[37]Johnson, lxxix.

[38]HBCA B. 60/a.11, November 22, 1812; HBCA B. 60/a.12, October 8, 1813.

[39]Ray, "The Northern Great Plains"; Coues, 577. At times only unborn calves were eaten, E. 3/2, February 10, 1793.

[40]Ray, *Indians*, 126-7.

Posts near Lake Winnipeg became resupply depots. Indians supplied dried meat, pounded meat, fat, grease, and occasionally dried berries to the traders.[41] Those at the post actually processed these raw materials into pemmican.[42] Although the Blackfoot provided fresh and dried meat, there is no evidence that they provided pemmican in any significant amount between 1794 and 1814.

Horses were a part of Blackfoot trade even before the era of direct trade with Europeans.[43] Traders formed a new market for horses. The Blackfoot Confederacy possessed more horses than other Indians in the Saskatchewan country. The importance of the horse trade is difficult to gauge because traders often did not record it.[44] In the second decade of the nineteenth century, the trade in horses is mentioned more often, probably because Company officials had ordered that horses be acquired for the Selkirk settlement. Although trade in horses was always profitable for the Blackfoot, and its importance appears to have grown gradually, it is impossible to judge the numbers of horses they traded.

By relying on these resources the Blackfoot appear to have been readily able to meet their needs. Much of what they acquired in trade consisted of luxury items. Particularly important was their trade in tobacco. The Blackfoot obviously felt little desire to supply the traders with the product they sought most eagerly: beaver. This constantly disappointed traders of both companies. Only the Peigan ever became known as beaver hunters. Religious beliefs may account for the

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[41]See Ray "The Northern Great Plains", 265.

[42]Company men appear to have been involved in the production of pemmican, Johnson, 82, 83, 86, 115, 116.

[43]Glover, 49.

[44]For example, the October 13, 1801 entry in B. 34/a.3 (official journal) makes no mention of trade in horses, while the corresponding entry in Fidler's personal journal (B. 39/a.2) does.

reluctance of some members of the Blackfoot Confederacy to kill beaver.[45] Yet, in 1792 Fidler observed that some Peigan did shoot beaver in the summer when the water was open, but they would not do so during the winter.[46] In 1813 and afterward Hudson's Bay Company traders continued to complain that the Peigan were unwilling to kill beaver in winter when their fur was thickest.[47] The Blood and Blackfoot did occasionally trade beaver, but they traded significant amounts only when they had pillaged American trappers working beaver in the Missouri River basin.[48] Blackfoot lands would have had fewer beaver than Peigan lands, yet Henry believed that beavers were indeed numerous in Blackfoot country. Nevertheless, traders could not convince the Blackfoot to hunt beaver.[49]

Clearly then, despite their "junior" role in the fur trade, the Blackfoot could produce sufficient supplies to meet their needs for European goods. The Blackfoot found that their niche in the fur trade was that of plains provisioner. Their role as provisioners rather than beaver hunters was a role which they chose for themselves. At the same time the Blackfoot found access to military hardware increasingly critical, especially as relations with neighbouring Indians became less friendly. The question of the appropriate strategy to take with traders and neighbours became increasingly central to the Blackfoot. Put somewhat simplistically, the question appears to have become one of "confrontation or cooperation."

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[45]HBCA E. 3/2, November 27, 1792.

[46]HBCA E. 3/2, November 27, 1792.

[47]HBCA B. 60/a.12, October 17, 1813. A similar comment was made in 1822, HBCA B. 34/a.4, October 4, 1822.

[48]Coues, 541.

[49]Coues, 529. It does appear that the Blackfoot Confederacy led fur traders to believe that there were more beaver on their lands than was actually the case, E. 3/2, September 20, 1800, B. 34/a.4, September 29, 1822.

CHAPTER 2
THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF DIVISION IN BLACKFOOT SOCIETY, 1793-1814

Between 1794 and 1815 Blackfoot society divided into two groups. Although this division centred around the Blackfoot involvement in the fur trade it was rooted in forces within Blackfoot society. Two Blackfoot leaders were important in the initial division of Blackfoot society in 1794.

Fur traders used several different names to identify the main leaders in Blackfoot society between 1794 and 1814; however, several characteristics of these men allow us to determine that these different names referred to only two men.[1] The first of these men was a man Peter Fidler identified as "the Feathers" or "the Feather". Feather was clearly one of the most important chiefs among the Blackfoot in 1802 when Fidler repeatedly dealt with him at Chesterfield House. Remarkably, Fidler never described his personal relationship with any Indians at Chesterfield House. In later years other Hudson's Bay Company traders described Feathers as a man who sought peaceful relations with neighbouring Indians and as a man whom white traders trusted. His demeanour toward other Indians and toward traders will be the subject of close attention later in this study; at this point however, descriptions of his behaviour are important because they strongly suggest that Feathers and a man Alexander Henry called "Painted Feather" are the same man. Henry described Painted Feather as a very cooperative Indian.[2] Fidler and Henry described Feathers and Painted Feather respectively as one of two main leaders of the Blackfoot, adding weight to the conclusion that these two names refer to one man.

Curiously, Peter Fidler clearly indicated that Feathers's Blackfoot name was "Ak ko makki", a name which translates most

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[1]A clarification of how these names are used in this study appears on page viii.

[2]Coues, 530.

appropriately as "Old Swan" or "Many Swans".[3] The discrepancy between the English name "Feathers" and the translation of Ak ko makki offers vital information about this man. It was normal for a Blackfoot man to change his name several times during his life. Since these names had special significance for a particular families, they were considered family possessions.[4] A man might assume the name of his father, grandfather or uncle. Apparently Feathers changed his name to Ak ko makki (Old Swan) after 1794 when his father (Old Swan) died.[5] In order to avoid confusion traders would have continued to call him Feathers or Painted Feather, which would have been rough translations of the man's earlier name. For the same reason he will also be identified as Feathers or Painted Feather in this study.

The second important leader is a man whom the North West Company officers called Gros Blanc, but whom Peter Fidler identified as the Big Man, Fatt man or Fat man. The North West Company traders may have called him Gros Blanc because he generally rode a white mule.[6] "Big Man" is an accurate translation of "O mok a pee", the Blackfoot name which Fidler recorded for Fat Man.[7] While Feathers assumed his father's name O mok a pee clearly adopted his name because of his most remarkable physical characteristic. Great physical size establishes that Gros Blanc and Big Man were the same man. Duncan M'Gillivray described Gros

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[3]HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 98d; Hugh A. Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye". See also, Tims, John William, *Grammar and Dictionary of the Blackfoot Language in the Dominion of Canada For the Use of Missionaries, School Teachers and Others* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, [1889]).

[4]Dempsey, *Crowfoot*, 4; Dempsey, *Red Crow*, 9; Dempsey, "The Blackfoot Indians", 422.

[5]Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye".

[6]Coues, 543.

[7]HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 97d; Hugh A. Dempsey, telephone conversation, November 18, 1991; see also Tims.

Blanc as "immense" in 1794.[8] Alexander Henry the Younger was more descriptive in 1809: "This man is called Gros Blanc, being extraordinarily corpulent. I had the curiosity to measure his bulk,and found he was around the shoulders 5 feet 7 inches, and around the waist 6 feet 4 inches."[9] Peter Fidler's 1801 description of "the Fatt man" is remarkably similar to Henry's description: "A Blackfoot Chief came in called the Fatt Man, he is the most corpulent Indian in the five nations that trades at the inland settlements, being upwards of 6 1/2 feet round the belly and otherways stout in proportion."[10] This evidence strongly suggests that Gros Blanc and Fatt Man were the same man. He is uniformly cast as troublesome and audacious. These two men, Feathers and Big Man, led the Blackfoot bands after 1794.

If patterns apparent in later years prevailed at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Blackfoot society and leadership exhibited remarkable fluidity and informality. The "tribe" had little meaning in everyday Blackfoot social and political life. The basic social, economic and political unit was the residential band with an extended family as its nucleus.[11] Based on information from later years, the size of these bands could vary from ten to thirty six tents (110-432 people) with twenty four tents being an average.[12] Groups of residential bands interacted often. Each of these groups, also referred to as "bands", were given names. In later years the Blackfoot were

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[8]Morton, 45.

[9]Coues, 543.

[10]HBCA B. 34/a.3, October 24, 1801.

[11]John C. Ewers, *Blackfeet Indians: Ethnological report on the Blackfeet and Gros Ventre tribes of Indians* (New York: Garland, 1974), 11; Clark Wissler, "Social Organization and Ritualistic Ceremonies of the Blackfoot Indians" American Museum of Natural History *Anthropological Papers*. Vol. 7, Part 1 (1911), 22.

[12]Ewers, *Blackfeet Indians*, 13; Ewers, *The Blackfeet Indians, Raiders*, 97.

divided into six such bands, each with its own name.[13] Any correlation between these bands and the regional bands which Feathers and Big Man led is impossible to discover. Since Blackfoot band members were usually related Blackfoot society operated very differently from modern states, but similarly to large close-knit families. Naturally then, leadership too was informal.

As use of the word "tribe" to describe Blackfoot society can be misleading, so too is the word "chief" if it is understood that chiefs filled an institutionalized position of power. Each family had a leader. Heads of individual families would follow a man who, as a "father" or "grandfather" was recognized as particularly experienced and skilled in guiding the affairs of the band. This man would be very influential even though, from a Euro-Canadian perspective, he had no official standing or coercive authority. Only his recognized wisdom and influence ensured that his counsel was followed by his kinsmen.[14]

At times when food was plentiful or threat of attack was great, residential bands camped together, with each band retaining its identity. The mobility which horses allowed made large encampments possible. For example Fidler counted 220 tents of Peigan, Blackfoot, Cree and Sarcee in one encampment during the winter of 1792-93.[15] When residential bands camped together one band leader would be recognized as the preeminent leader. In this way residential band leaders became aware of a kind of hierarchy among themselves. Similarly, when the entire "tribe" was camped together, one man would lead. Only in this sense was there a tribal chief.

Although traders worked to enhance the prestige of certain leaders, chiefs derived their status from within Blackfoot society.

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[13]Wissler, "Social Organization", 21.

[14]Glover, 265.

[15]HBCA E. 3/2, January 10, 1793.

Several factors determined who would rise to prominence. Since warfare was an important part of the Plains Indians' ways of life a man's war record greatly affected his eligibility for leadership.[16] Fidler noted that

> it is a constant custom when any of the Slave Indians are coming in to the Houses to send for Tobacco a day or 2 prior to their arrival--and it is further observed that he that never killed an Enemy, is not entitled to send for Tobacco--altho he should be a very old man--but are looked upon by their Country men little better than Old Women.[17]

In a similar vein, Henry noted that as a band approached the traders each man's rank was determined by the number of scalps he had taken in war.[18]

The man with the best war record was not necessarily the band leader. The most respected warrior often led war excursions, but, especially since raids often took him away from the band, he may have had a subordinate role in civil matters. More important for everyday life were a man's kinship ties, his ability and willingness to share wealth, and his skills in oratory and diplomacy.[19] Based on such characteristics a man would become a recognized band leader.

Both Big Man and Feathers had influence beyond their own residential bands; however, how each man achieved his prestige is difficult to determine. Fur traders did not describe either man's family connections or reputation as a great orator or generous man. It is apparent that Feathers had some qualifications which were not prerequisites for leadership but which would have improved his chances to lead. Feathers had the advantage of being the son of a prominent

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[16]Hugh A. Dempsey, "History", 97; Anthony McGinnis, *Counting Coup and Cutting Horses* (Evergreen, Colorado: Cordillera Press, 1990), 23-26.

[17]HBCA B. 34/a.2, December 19, 1800.

[18]Coues, 728.

[19]Dempsey, "History" 97; Ewers, *Blackfeet Indians*, 14; Ewers, *The Horse*, 248; Glover, 252.

leader. Chieftainship was not hereditary but since those who were close to prominent leaders enjoyed some advantages, leadership did have a tendency to pass along family lines.[20] Similarly, certain bands may have had a tendency to produce prominent tribal leaders, probably because of a web of family relations among various bands.[21] A network of such relations would help a man gain influence. Information about Feathers's family relations is scant. In fact even information about siblings and children can only be gleaned from incidental comments in the journals. Feathers had at least one son and a brother with whom he frequently appeared at fur trade posts.

Traders provided somewhat more detail about Big Man's reputation. He was well known among the Indians as a courageous warrior. M'Gillivray mentioned that his great size and his reputation as a warrior added to his prestige.[22] Traders accounts, however, provide little information about his family connections. He had at least two brothers, one who died in battle against the Shoshoni in 1793 and another, called the Sun, who died in 1809.[23] Hudson's Bay Company traders referred to "Gros Blanc's son" in 1822.[24]

Other information which would give a better understanding of these men is noticeably absent. Alexander Henry reported that during the years before 1810 the Blackfoot Confederacy enjoyed such military superiority over their enemies that many warriors had killed fifteen or twenty enemies.[25] However, he did not say how many men Gros Blanc or

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[20]Dempsey, "History" 97; Peigan chief Sakatow, was the son of an earlier chief, and the father of a later one, Glover, 252. Peigan chief, Kootanae Appe was the son of a chief of the same name, Glover, 245, 248.

[21]Dempsey, "History", 99.

[22]Morton, 44-5.

[23]Morton, 45; Coues, 543.

[24]HBCA B. 34/a.4, October 29, 1822.

[25]Coues, 527.

Painted Feather had killed. While Henry mentioned that the richest men among the Blackfoot had up to fifty horses he did not identify these men.[26] Since wealth increased one's ability to be generous to others it is likely that Big Man and Feathers were among the richest men among the Blackfoot at the time. Similarly, Henry reported that Blackfoot men could have as many as six or seven wives, but he did not record the number of wives that Painted Feather or Gros Blanc had.[27] Both men appear to have been of senior years by 1810. Henry estimated Gros Blanc to be over sixty years of age in 1808.[28] Feathers had a married son by 1801 and was described as old in 1810.[29]

Traders had little ability to increase or to decrease the prestige of Blackfoot men. Clearly, status in Blackfoot society was attained by those who possessed essential practical abilities and kin relationships. The scant information which we have about the reputations of Big Man and Feathers shows that they possessed important qualifications to lead. Euro-Canadian traders who wished to enhance the position of cooperative leaders and bands had to work within these constraints. They could not set up a "puppet" chief.

Since the European goods were very significant to the Blackfoot a leader's reputation among traders could affect his prestige in Blackfoot society. Naturally traders could not improve a leader's reputation as a warrior or buffalo hunter, but they could increase his ability to show generosity to band members. By presenting certain men with generous gifts the traders hoped to encourage the allegiance of chiefs to the traders. Since the gifts would be distributed to the band members they

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[26]Coues, 526.

[27]Coues, 526; Thompson noted that Peigan chiefs had three to six wives, Glover, 255. Kootanae Appe had twenty two sons and four daughters, Glover, 253.

[28]Coues, 543.

[29]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 31, 1801; Coues, 527.

hoped band members' loyalty to cooperative leaders would increase. From the perspective of the trader such gift-giving was an attempt to influence Blackfoot behaviour. From the perspective of a band member lavish gifts revealed the influence which the band leader had with the traders. David Mandelbaum's assessment of the effect which gift-giving had on Cree leadership reveals both perspectives:

> The Hudson's Bay Company disturbed the pattern of chieftainship in some degree. When a group arrived to trade at a post, the factors customarily presented the chief with several barrels of whiskey and a large amount of trade goods to distribute among his followers. Thus it became a matter of some importance to be recognized as a chief by the Company. Since the traders favored the peaceful industrious trappers and discouraged the aggressive troublesome warriors, in late years certain chiefs arose whose war achievements were not particularly outstanding.[30]

For some Blackfoot leaders and band members the traders' recognition of a leader as a peaceful and industrious Indian could have important consequences. Evidence shows that the favour with which traders looked upon chiefs among the Confederacy did affect their standing among their own people. In 1842, Holy Snake, the sister of the Blood chief, Seen-From-Afar, married Alexander Culbertson of the American Fur Company. The marriage had a dramatic and lasting effect on the status, not only of Seen-From-Afar, but of his band. The leadership of the Blood moved from the Followers of the Buffalo band to Seen-From-Afar's Fish Eaters band.[31] However, Seen-From-Afar was a prominent band leader before the marriage of his sister. Clearly his status was based on far more than his sister's marriage to Culbertson and the economic advantages that her marriage would have brought to him and his band. The traders' influence was restricted to enhancing the status of certain men who had already risen to leadership positions. It was under these conditions the Big Man and Feathers rose to prominence among the Blackfoot.

Although the evidence is inconclusive it appears that the

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[30]Mandelbaum, 108.

[31]Dempsey, "History", 46, 99.

Blackfoot were less divided before 1794 than afterward. Duncan M'Gillivray's Fort George journal entry for December 17, 1794 contains a very significant passage which suggests that division in Blackfoot society began soon after the death of Old Swan in 1794. A close reading of the journal entry will shed considerable light on Blackfoot society in that important year:

> At night 5 Blackfeet arrived one of whom is the Old Swans son. The Swan was once the greatest Cheif [sic] of this Nation and was respected and esteemed by all the neighbouring tribes; his intentions towards white people have been always honest and upright, and while he retained any authority his band never attempted anything to our prejudice. At length being worn out with age and debility he was forced to resign his place to the Gros Blanc, a man of unbounded ambition and ferocity, but he still held a respectable place in the Band. Leaving the Fort a few days ago he unluckily Stumbled over a Dog, and broke some blood vessel which occasioned his death 2 days thereafter;--his relations are now returned to lament his memory, which they do in very mournfull terms, and his Son wishing to forsake his former condition is ambitious of being considered a young Cheif desirous of tracing the footsteps of his father: And as a first mark of his quality Mr. Shaw has indulged him with a cloathing [sic].[32]

Old Swan had clearly been instrumental in ensuring that the initial response to fur traders had been a cooperative one. At the same time, he had sought to maintain peace with other Indian groups. The level of influence Old Swan enjoyed should be noted. M'Gillivray clearly indicated that this chief was able to influence the behaviour of individuals. Furthermore, Old Swan's status was of more than passing concern to the traders. Leading Indians clearly affected the actions of band members. Fidler's first journal entry, during a winter spent with Sakatow's band of Peigan Indians, in 1792, indicated that members of the band were no trouble to his party "as the man that has the care of us is the Chief of their whole tribe."[33] Later events demonstrated Sakatow's influence. When a band of Sarcee met Fidler in the company of Sakatow and his band he was treated very well, but when the same Sarcee band met

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[32]Morton, 50.

[33]HBCA E. 3/2, November 9, 1792. Fidler never identified this man as Sakatow, but Tomison did, HBCA B. 24/a.1, letter from William Tomison to James Tate, November 11, 1792.

Fidler's companion who had strayed from the band, "they ill used him, when alone, and threatened to take his Horses & everything of Goods he had."[34]

Since Old Swan would have been the chief who first led his people to the fur trade posts he was acutely aware of the benefits of direct trade to his people, and to himself. Like White Buffalo Robe, the first Peigan chief to take his people to the fur trade posts, he was very accommodating to the traders.[35] There were several reasons that initial responses to fur traders may have been particularly accommodating. One explanation may lie in the initial wonder with which traders were viewed. The Blackfoot word for "white person" is "Napikwan" (Old Man Person), a word derived from the name of the mythical "Napi" (Old Man), a prominent figure in Blackfoot mythology. The Blackfoot did not view Napi, a mischievous trickster, with unmitigated admiration. Nevertheless, Napi was the creator of the earth, animals (including the buffalo) and people.[36] That the Blackfoot associated these suppliers of guns and other goods with Napi, demonstrates the first impression traders made on the Blackfoot. Another explanation for Old Swan's cooperative behaviour may lie in a fear that the traders would abandon the Blackfoot if they treated the traders poorly. Fur traders did occasionally threaten to leave a group of Indians if they were unhappy with Indian behaviour. Leading Peigan Indians apparently tried to convince other Indians to cooperate with traders out of fear that otherwise, the traders would leave.[37] Following their attacks on

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[34]HBCA E. 3/2, November 13-14, 1792.

[35]Coues, 719. Kootanae Appe had a similar reputation, Glover, 253.

[36]Ewers, *The Blackfeet Raiders*, 19, 3-5; Coues 528; George Bird Grinnell, *Blackfeet Indian Stories* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1913), 156-188.

[37]Coues, 720-1; Glover, 253. Kootanae Appe used deception to prevent his own band from attacking Rocky Mountain House, Hopwood, 267-69.

Manchester House and South Branch House in 1793 and 1794 the Atsina faced the hostility of other Indians.[38] When the Atsina caused problems at Chesterfield House in 1802 they were threatened by the Blackfoot.[39] For the half century from 1730 to 1780 the Blackfoot depended on the Cree for European goods. When relations with the Cree deteriorated the Blackfoot would have seen the prospect of the traders refusing to trade with them as a serious threat to their security. By being especially accommodating Old Swan may have felt that he was ensuring access to increasingly important European goods.

Traders of each company often denounced those of the other for debauching the Indians with alcohol. Alcohol, they believed, encouraged belligerence among the Indians. More likely, as the Indians became familiar with the traders, they lost whatever sense of awe they felt. They quickly understood that the traders were always eager to trade with more Indians and were not likely to leave their country. The perceived need to be accommodating waned further when individuals came to understand that they could use a more assertive policy to their advantage. Big Man was one of the leaders who employed an assertive, even aggressive, behaviour toward traders.

M'Gillivray's journal entry illustrates the gradual succession that was common in Blackfoot society. M'Gillivray suggested that by 1794 Old Swan's influence had already been superseded by that of Gros Blanc. It was not unusual among band societies, and in later Blackfoot society, for a chief's influence to wane with his physical vigour. Fidler noted the same process occurring with Sakatow, chief among the Peigan in 1792. Sakatow was gradually relinquishing his position to his

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[38]Milloy, 34.

[39]HBCA B. 34/a.3 March 8, 9, 1802. In the face of a threatened Atsina attack on Rocky Mountain House in 1811, the Peigan threatened to fight for the traders against the Atsina, Coues, 721.

own son.[40] In the case of Old Swan, leadership of much of the tribe was gradually passing to a man who was probably not his direct descendent. The process may have begun several years earlier, for in 1788 "the Fat Man" was already well known to traders.[41] Big Man was probably the leader of a different residential band, but his influence had apparently spread over other bands, including Old Swan's. While Old Swan's experience and wisdom would allow him to retain a level of influence, his frailty ensured the Gros Blanc would eclipse him. Referring to a later time period, Hugh Dempsey explained that this passage of influence from an older man to a younger man would normally occur without resistance.[42] In this case though, the change in leadership brought a very different attitude toward the traders and toward neighbouring Indians. It is clear that the traders did not welcome the decline of Old Swan and the rise of Gros Blanc. Old Swan's policy of friendly relations with traders and neighbours was losing influence with the decline of its main proponent.

As long as Old Swan retained his authority the behaviour of his band reflected the behaviour of its leader, but Gros Blanc's rise in prominence coincided with a change in band behaviour. Duncan M'Gillivray knew Gros Blanc well. Gros Blanc's band had participated in the Atsina attack on the Hudson's Bay Company's Manchester House and the North West Company's Pine Island House in October 1793 while M'Gillivray was stationed at Pine Island House.[43] M'Gillivray's journals do not indicate whether the Blackfoot were actually separated into two factions in the late years of Old Swan's leadership. The account surrounding Old Swan's death implies that Gros Blanc enjoyed a similar influence over

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[40]HBCA E. 3/2, November 9, 1792; see also Glover, 252.

[41]HBCA B. 121/a.3 fo. 56, letter from William Walker to William Tomison, September 12, 1788.

[42]Dempsey, "History", 97.

[43]Morton, 44; Milloy, 33.

the Blackfoot bands as Old Swan had exercised until Gros Blanc superseded him. Undoubtedly, M'Gillivray found the prospect of dealing with a people led by Gros Blanc an unpleasant one. For this reason the traders hoped that Old Swan's son, who was rising to challenge Gros Blanc, might be able to turn the tide of Blackfoot aggressiveness. The Old Swan's son was Feathers.[44]

M'Gillivray's description of Old Swan's son is problematic because it can be understood in two very different ways. The different interpretations centre on how to understand M'Gillivray's reference to Feathers's "former condition". One could assume that M'Gillivray's reference to his desire to "forsake his former condition" represented his desire to make up for a poor reputation among his own people which had prevented him from succeeding his father as leader of this residential band. While leadership in Blackfoot society often passed from father to son no son could expect to inherit his father's prestige unless he had earned respect through his own actions. M'Gillivray implied that the behaviour of the Old Swan's band had deteriorated as Old Swan had become infirm. This suggests that the leadership had passed to an uncooperative man and that his band was falling into the orbit of Gros Blanc's aggressive policy. For this reason Angus Shaw, North West Company partner at Fort George, moved to recognize Feathers as the chief of the residential band. Perhaps this would allow Feathers to influence the band and restore more cooperative Blackfoot behaviour. At the same time Feathers would be indebted to the traders.

This interpretation leaves several nagging questions. If Feathers had a poor reputation among his own people why did he tell the traders that he had resolved to forsake this condition? Surely his own people would be the ones interested in such a decision. But how could he now atone for a reputation which had prevented him from leading his band? He could not suddenly change his war record or his hunting abilities.

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[44]Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye".

These questions have no satisfactory answer. But there is an even more important problem with this interpretation.

By 1801 Feathers was a principal man among the Blackfoot. By 1808 he led a larger portion of the Blackfoot than Gros Blanc did.[45] This would lead us to conclude that the traders were able to raise a man who had a low standing within his own residential band in 1794 to a position of great influence among all of the Blackfoot. Yet we have seen that the traders lacked such influence among most Indians and among the Blackfoot in particular. Feathers did not become merely a trading captain for his band; he became the single most influential man among the Blackfoot. Shaw's indulgence of Feathers sent a message to the Blackfoot that Feathers had now inherited the influence over the traders which had once belonged to his father. This development would certainly heighten his prestige; however, in order for Shaw's actions to be effective, Feathers must already have been a leading man. Feathers's "former condition" cannot refer to the Feathers's poor reputation among his own people.

Feathers's "former condition" can be better understood to refer to a reputation which Feathers had earned among the traders, not among his own people. Thus, much like Big Man, Feathers had a reputation for his bold and aggressive demeanour toward the white traders. He now promised to abandon this policy in favour of his father's peaceful policy. As Old Swan was aging, his son had become a leader in his father's band. Perhaps the time was right for him to turn from his confrontational policy. Perhaps his exploits in war and raiding helped him achieve the wealth and reputation of bravery that was instrumental in gaining status. If so, he was like most ambitious young men in Plains Indian societies. Young men who had not yet proved their courage and amassed a large horse herd sought to do so through warfare and raiding, but older men, who had already earned their social standing, rarely participated

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[45]Coues, 530.

in warfare.[46] While Old Swan had been leader the band had always been cooperative with traders; however, his son had already begun to assume leadership before Old Swan died. Thus it was Old Swan's son who presided over the change in band behaviour to which M'Gillivray alluded. By continuing his aggressive behaviour after his father's death, Feathers would probably retain the leadership of his residential band, but he would remain second in influence to Gros Blanc among the Blackfoot bands. As a courageous man Gros Blanc had earned an unequaled reputation:

> This formidable cheif [sic] is universally feared by all the neighbouring nations, his immense size contributes Greatly to this distinction & some acts of personal courage which he has displayed on many occasions have established his reputation so firmly that he is supposed to be the most daring and intrepid Indian in this Department.[47]

By 1794, and probably for several years before, Feathers was already leading his father's band; however, he was a follower of Big Man--a man whose reputation as a bold and courageous Indian outstripped his own. At the same time there was a large part of the Blackfoot, and certainly of his father's band, who had profited from Old Swan's policy of friendly relations with the traders. By announcing his intentions to adopt his father's trading strategy he could secure the allegiance of his band, and increase his influence over the men who led other bands. Also, in adopting Old Swan's policy, Feathers posed a clear challenge to Gros Blanc's leadership. The soured relationship between Gros Blanc and the traders as a result of Gros Blanc's participation in the raid on Manchester House may have led some Blackfoot to distance themselves from him and his band. When Old Swan died Feathers took his band back to Fort George to announce to the traders that he had decided to "forsake his former condition" in order to follow "the footsteps of his father".

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[46]HBCA B. 34/a.3, January 8, 1802; Ewers, *The Horse*, 249; McGinnis, 23.

[47]Morton, 45-6.

Clearly he was renouncing Big Man's policies and adopting those of his father.

Feathers's decision to adopt and maintain his father's friendly relations with the traders does not indicate that Feathers derived his position from the traders. Neither did Feathers's policy stem from an awe of the traders. In 1794 it did not even indicate a particular personal attachment to them. Feathers's attitude toward the traders is more clearly understood as rooted in a farsighted and ambitious effort to increase his social standing among his own people. Old Swan's death left that part of the Blackfoot which valued its close relationship with the traders without a leading proponent. Feathers realized that, as residential band leader and son of Old Swan, he was perfectly positioned to lead the part of the Blackfoot which was left leaderless with Old Swan's death. The division in Blackfoot society had its roots in Feathers's practical politics.

The traders were not mere spectators. The preferential treatment given to members of friendly Indian bands may not have been the source of division in Blackfoot society, but it would serve to entrench the division. Feathers and his band would receive preferential treatment as long as they maintained peaceful relations with the traders. Upon arriving at fur trade posts they would receive generous gifts. Traders would be more likely to turn to them when they required certain goods or services. Particularly at Chesterfield House they would profit from providing services to the traders. In 1794 Angus Shaw's decision to "indulge him with a cloathing" was made in order to tip the balance against Gros Blanc--probably to some effect.

Feathers's 1794 announcement that he intended to adopt the trade policy of his father would have been made, not merely to the traders, but to the Blackfoot as well. Ultimately various Blackfoot residential bands would choose between Feathers and Big Man. As a result, the

Blackfoot became divided into two groups or "regional bands".[48] In the 1801-1802 season at Chesterfield House Fidler often referred to "gangs" among the Blackfoot. Peter Fidler was a careful and meticulous recorder of information; his use of the word "gang" rather than "band" indicates that he was not describing a residential band. He categorized individuals as members of Feathers's "gang" or Big Man's (or Fat man's) "gang", but no other "gangs".[49] Similarly he identified certain tents of Indians as belonging to one of these two men's "gangs".[50] In rough notes indicating the number of guns sold to the Blackfoot he divided the Blackfoot into two gangs, Feathers's gang and Fat Man's gang.[51] It is also plain that a group of tents could be identified as belonging to a certain "gang" even though neither Feathers nor Big Man was with them. These groups of tents would have been residential bands, each with its own leadership which followed either Feathers or Big Man. This split was not merely something perceived by the traders. In a compilation of Atsina words, Fidler not only included Atsina words used to refer to various Indian peoples but also the Atsina words for "Fatt Mans gang" and Feathers's gang.[52] Clearly the "gangs" were groups of affiliated bands. Unfortunately, although he suggested that Feathers was predominant, Fidler did not indicate the size of each gang in 1802.

It appears that the division between the two Blackfoot bands survived at least until 1810. Documents relating to the period between 1802 and 1808 do not mention any Blackfoot individuals by name; however, it is clear that by 1808 Feathers and Big Man were well known

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[48]There is a history of Blood bands forming affiliations, Dempsey, "History", 98-9. It was also possible for a man to announce his desire to lead a band by inviting band members to leave a band with him, Dempsey, "History", 96.

[49]See HBCA B. 39/a.2 fo. 96d.

[50]See HBCA B. 39/a.2, March 25, 1802.

[51]HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 97d.

[52]HBCA B. 34/a.1, fo. 7.

to traders on the North Saskatchewan. Alexander Henry the Younger's description of the Blackfoot in 1808 reveals that they continued to be divided into two groups of affiliated bands, led by the two principal men. In his 1808 population estimate of the Blackfoot, Henry judged Painted Feather's band to number 120 tents (360 warriors), and the Cold band to number 80 tents (160 warriors).[53] The derivation of the term "Cold band" is unclear; however, it is clear the Gros Blanc was the leader of this band.[54] Thus, these two bands correspond exactly to Fidler's "Feathers's gang" and "Big Man's gang".

These two regional bands are groups of residential bands, each of which followed the example and leadership of the two preeminent leaders. Because these two regional bands are the focus of this study each will be identified simply as a "band". The term " residential band" will be used to refer to the smaller extended family bands.

Henry estimated that sixty percent of the Blackfoot were aligned under Painted Feather's leadership. How the size of each band had changed in relation to the other over the years is impossible to determine. M'Gillivray's 1794 assertion that Gros Blanc was the most important chief certainly suggests the Painted Feather's band had grown since 1794. On one hand, it was easy for individuals to move from one band to another. It is even possible that entire residential bands changed allegiances over the years. On the other hand, there would have been an "inertia" keeping residential bands together. While any band could contain non-relatives, even individuals from other Indian peoples, kinship ties tended to keep residential bands together.

Like Fidler, Henry could identify residential bands and the chiefs as belonging to either Painted Feather's band or Gros Blanc's band even

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[53]Coues, 530.

[54]Coues, 543. In his observations on Henry's Painted Feather/Cold band division, Clark Wissler suggested that it my have been a temporary segregation under two dominant leaders, Wissler, "Social Organization", 8.

when the principal man was not present. On September 16, 1809 Henry identified a band led by Three Bears as part of Painted Feather's band.[55] Similarly, a large part of the Cold band had camped at Fort Vermilion for several days before its chief, Gros Blanc, arrived.[56]

Many of Henry's comments confirm what Fidler implied in 1801-02. Fidler's journals suggest that Feathers's band and Big Man's band lived very separate lives. Henry's journals indicate this explicitly:

> The Blackfeet, Bloods, and Piegans may be considered under one grand appellation of Slave Indians. The tract of land they call their own at present begins on a line due S[outh] from Fort Vermillion to the South Branch of the Saskatchewan and up that stream to the foot of the Rocky mountains; then goes N[orth] along the mountains until it strikes the N[orth] Branch of the Saskatchewan, and down that steam to the Vermillion river. Painted Feather's band of Blackfeet are the most eastern; next to them are the Cold band of Blackfeet; near these again are the Bloods; and the Piegans or Picaneaux dwell along the foot of the mountains.[57]

Henry's description of the territory which each group of Indians occupied is not our main interest. Clearly, by 1808 the Blackfoot Confederacy frequently occupied areas considerably south of the area described above.[58] More important is Henry's description of the territory of the two Blackfoot bands. Gros Blanc's bands and Painted Feather's bands clearly tended to camp in different areas. Each had its own territory and leadership. There are no records that suggest that the two groups camped together. Therefore, it seems that the division which Fidler implied existed in 1801 continued to exist throughout the period under study.

Henry's journals also confirm Fidler's implication that the two bands traded separately even when they were at trading posts together.

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[55]Coues, 542.

[56]Coues, 543.

[57]Coues, 524.

[58]Fidler indicated that the Peigan travelled well south of this area as early as 1792, HBCA E. 3/2, February 21, 1793; Henry himself described "Slave Indian" territory as extending to the Missouri, Coues, 532, 723.

Of particular interest is an occasion in September 1809 when members of both Painted Feather's band and the Cold band were at Fort Vermilion. When Alexander Henry arrived at the fort on September 13, he "found about 300 tents of Indians all on the S[outh], on both sides of the Vermillion river. They were a part of two tribes of Blackfeet, Painted Feather's band and the Cold band," although Gros Blanc was not with this party.[59] On this occasion Alexander Henry described the way he undertook his trade with these Indians. He began by inviting Painted Feather, with thirty principal men, into Fort Vermilion. After presenting gifts of rum and tobacco Henry discussed the terms of trade for that season. After this party returned to their camp on the south side of the North Saskatchewan River forty principal men of the Cold band were similarly received.[60]

The documents give us very little information about the relationship between these two leaders or their bands. It would be easy to assume that relations were very strained. There would have been much reason for a competitive if not antagonistic relationship between the two bands. Alexander Henry noted that the Blackfoot Confederacy "frequently have bloody battles among themselves, but it is seldom long before peace is restored.[61] In 1809 violence broke out between the Painted Feather's band and the Cold band while they were camped near one another. This led the Cold band to move west farther from Painted Feather's band.[62]

This is the only record of violence between the two bands. According to Henry, the Blackfoot believed that murder of a person

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[59]Coues, 539.

[60]Coues, 541.

[61]Coues, 533.

[62]Coues, 572.

within their nation was punished in the afterlife.[63] Such beliefs are common in band societies.[64] Clearly the Blackfoot understood the threat of uncontrolled violence in a society with no institutionalized methods of law enforcement. While revenge might be the rule when violence broke out between bands of different nations Big Man's band clearly sought to avoid any escalation of conflict in 1809. The separation of the bands was a response designed to avoid bloodshed. If band leaders did not feel they could coexist peacefully they avoided any unnecessary contact.[65] It is worth noting that there were many occasions upon which members of the two bands visited the same fort without any evidence of friction. Evidently overt violence between the bands was exceptional.

Whether relations between these bands was usually harmonious is even more difficult to assess because outward appearances and inner feelings may have been very different. Fidler illustrated the discrepancy between appearance and reality in 1792: "altho these 2 Tribes [Peigan and Blood] speak exactly the same language & appear outwardly very friendly--they in their Hearts hate one another."[66] The remark was made after some Peigan had failed to get a significant amount of tobacco from a Blood camp.

On November 1, 1810, Henry learned that "Gros Blanc, chief of the Cold band, died a few days ago of the prevalent disease."[67] Four years later, James Bird reported that "A band of Blackfeet Indians arrived all in mourning for the Death of their Chief called the Feather who was shot

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[63]Coues, 529.

[64]Elman R. Service, *The Hunters* Foundations of Modern Anthropology Series, ed. Marshall D. Sahlins. (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 1968), 48-54.

[65]Dempsey, "History", 98; Glover, 253; HBCA E. 3/2, January 1, 1793.

[66]HBCA E. 3/2, February 21, 1792.

[67]Coues, 660. The disease was probably syphilis, Coues, 527.

a few days since by a man of their own nation, but of another Tribe."[68] It is not the purpose of this study to discover whether the division of Blackfoot society outlived these two men. However, there is evidence that it did. Painted Feather was succeeded by another man who Hudson's Bay Company traders called Painted Feather or Feathers.[69] He had the same reputation as his predecessor.[70] He led the Bad Guns band of Blackfoot until his death in 1859 or 1860.[71] Gros Blanc's son is also mentioned in later documents.[72] During the 1850s two other principal men, Old Sun and Three Suns, led two remaining groups of Blackfoot. Both had reputations similar to Gros Blanc's.[73] There is also evidence that the Blackfoot were divided into two groups at the time they settled on the Blackfoot reserve east of Calgary.[74] Further research would be required to discover whether the division of Blackfoot society apparent in 1810 can be connected with the divisions in later Blackfoot history.

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[68]HBCA B. 60/a. 13, October 27, 1814. According to Dempsey, the murderer was a Blood, Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye".

[69]A man known as Painted Feather and Feathers visited Chesterfield House when it was reestablished in the 1822-23 season, HBCA B. 34/a.4, October 29, 1822, November 7, 1822. According to Dempsey this was a son or nephew of the earlier Painted Feather, Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye".

[70]HBCA B. 34/a.4, November 7, 1822. See also Nicholas Garry, "Diary of Nicholas Garry, Deputy-Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company from 1822-1835" *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* Series 2, vol. 6 (1900), Section 2: 203, and Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye".

[71]Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye".

[72]HBCA B. 34/a.4, October 29, 1822.

[73]Dempsey, *Crowfoot*, 28.

[74]Hugh A. Dempsey, telephone conversation, November 18, 1991

CHAPTER 3
TWO TRADING STRATEGIES, 1793-1805

In the years after 1794 the two Blackfoot bands used very different trading strategies. While both bands appear to have sought to secure their access to European goods, Feathers's band chose to be very cooperative and accommodating to traders and neighbouring Indians. Big Man's band behaved much more aggressively toward traders and neighbouring Indians. As there are no references to either Big Man or Feathers between 1795 and 1800, it is difficult to know what these men were doing during this time.[1] Descriptions of Big Man's behaviour in 1794 and in years after 1800 however, are consistent. For this reason, the events surrounding the attack on Manchester House in 1793 is worth close attention.

In October 1793, the Hudson's Bay Company's Manchester House and North West Company's Pine Island Fort (where Duncan M'Gillivray was stationed) were attacked by a combined force of Atsina apparently led by their war chief, a man referred to as "L'Homme a Calumet" or "L'Homme de Callumet", and Blackfoot of Gros Blanc's band. None of the traders were killed, but the forts were pillaged.[2] Spurred by the success of this attack, the Atsina attacked the South Branch Houses the following June. Several traders and Atsina, including L'Homme de Callumet were killed.[3]

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[1]According to Thomas F. Schilz, Feather and Big Man presented gifts to the Atsina in 1796 "and counseled them to make peace with the white men", Thomas F. Schilz, "The Gros Ventres and the Canadian Fur Trade, 1754-1831" *American Indian Quarterly* 12 (1988): 51. Unfortunately, Schilz's citation (Tyrrell, *David Thompson's, 383)* does not support his claim. Indeed, the reader ought to be aware that Schilz's article abounds with factual errors and citations which do not substantiate his evidence or his conclusions.

[2]Morton, lxvi, 32, 44; Milloy, 33; HBCA B. 24/a.2, October 22, 1793. Schilz asserts that Atsina chiefs Na-che-be and Oth-ot-ten were also involved in this attack, although he does so without foundation, Schilz, 50. (Na che be and Oth ot ten were Atsina men connected with the killing of two Iroquois men near Chesterfield House in 1802, Johnson, 313n.)

[3]Morton, 14; Milloy, 33; J. B. Tyrrell, "Peter Fidler, Trader and Surveyor, 1769 to 1822" *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada.* Series 3, Vol. 7 (1913), Section 2: 119.

The fundamental reason for the attacks appears to have been the chronic inability of the Atsina to acquire enough guns to protect themselves from their Cree enemies.[4] Like the Blackfoot, the Atsina had a peripheral role in the fur trade. In fact Atsina had more difficult access to trading posts and had fewer valuable fur-bearing animals in their territory than the Blackfoot did. Furthermore, it seems that one of their chiefs was frequently in conflict with neighbouring Indians.[5] The Atsina were gradually withdrawing toward the southwest during the time under study. During the summer of 1793 sixteen lodges of Atsina were attacked by the Cree near South Branch House. All but a few children were killed. This attack seems to have been the immediate cause of the attacks on the posts. According to M'Gillivray, the Atsina, "being intimidated from attempting any speedy revenge upon the Crees, formed the design of attacking us [the traders], whom they considered as the allies of their enemies."[6] The Atsina probably hoped that by taking guns and ammunition they would be better able to defend themselves from their enemies; however, the attacks only intensified their long-term supply problems. Cree belligerence, which intensified following the attacks, drove the Atsina farther from the posts. Furthermore, the Atsina could not simply resume peaceful trade with white men as if nothing had happened. The Atsina returned to the trading posts in 1795, but the traders remembered the attacks.

The motivation behind the Gros Blanc band's involvement in the attack on Manchester House is unclear, but for their part in the attack the band suffered from the traders' hostility. The band apparently did not visit the trading posts between October 1793 and November 1794. When Gros Blanc came to Fort George in November 1794, he hoped for an

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[4]Milloy, 33-34.

[5]Glover, 239.

[6]Morton, 62-63

easy reconciliation but was prepared for a confrontation. He sent fourteen horses ahead, hoping to atone for the theft of over twice that number of horses. He arrived at the fort with at least a hundred adult Blackfoot and Blood men. Rather than presenting their weapons to the traders before entering the fort as was the custom, they left them with their women. M'Gillivray described the ensuing exchange:

> being transported with rage at seeing no likelihood of receiving any atonement for the Injury I had Suffered, I sprung upon their greatest cheif [sic] the Gros Blanc & offered him an indignity which he will always remember with anger and resentment. They immediately made me a present consisting of a Horse, some finely ornamented Robes leggins &c and tho' he contributed his share yet he could not conceal his vexation at being so much humbled before so many spectators.... He remained a considerable time in the Hall in a state of suspence revolving in his mind in what manner to proceed: at length he issued out in a transport of fury to make preparations for instant departure, threatening vengeance against me, but his relations flocking about him in numbers opposed his design and after many entreaties they persuaded him to relinquish it;--And next morning a general peace was concluded betwixt all parties, tho' this circumstance plainly shewed that he retained a lively sense of what had passed.[7]

This incident is noteworthy not because it was typical, but because it was unusual.[8] Both the Indian attack and fur traders' response were unusual. It was common for Indians to take goods and horses without being punished by the traders. In fact, a Hudson's Bay Company employee, James Bird, complained that Indians could literally get away with murder although he added that violence against traders was very rare.[9] The attacks of 1793 and 1794 were aberrations and so too was M'Gillivray's response. Still, there is no evidence that M'Gillivray recovered all that had been taken. The traders' difficulties in seeking redress against Indians stemmed from their insistence that individuals responsible for thefts be identified.[10] As was frequently the case, M'Gillivray was able to identify the band responsible for the attack,

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[7]Morton, 45-46.

[8]Morton, 46.

[9]HBCA B. 60/a.7, October 19, 1807.

[10]HBCA B. 60/a.7, October 19, 1807.

but he was unable to find the individuals who were responsible.[11] The traders found the practice of taking indiscriminate revenge unacceptable and Gros Blanc and other Indians took advantage of this. At the same time, however, Gros Blanc seems to have felt that the 1793 attack had been a blunder. He and his band apparently attempted to smooth relations with the traders over the next few months.

M'Gillivray suggested that his encounter with Gros Blanc had a dramatic impact on the behaviour of the band:

> from being insolent and overbearing they are become entirely submissive and comport themselves with great circumspection to avoid giving offence.... This treatment has also produced a wonderfull alteration in their mode of trading.--I have seen one of this tribe employ a 1/2 hour in bartering a Dozen Wolves and twice as many Depouilles [buffalo fat] and so unreasonable as to demand a Gun, Pistol, or any other article that attracted his attention for one Skin and yet seem but little disappointed on being offered 2 feet Tobacco for it. Now they trade more expeditiously; accept whatever is given in return for their commodities with a good grace; and seem thankful and satisfied with any trifling present, tho' our usual liberality to them is greatly withdrawn.[12]

It is unclear when this passage was written. It is dated November 26, the same date as the description of the encounter between M'Gillivray and Gros Blanc. It is likely that it was written later that same season. In that time Gros Blanc did not return to Fort George, although M'Gillivray received contradictory messages about him: one suggesting that Gros Blanc intended to attack the fort in the summer (a rumour which M'Gillivray did not believe), and another saying that the Gros Blanc had adopted M'Gillivray for his brother "to replace a real one who has been killed last Summer in War by the Snake Indians."[13] Members of Gros Blanc's band did trade in April 1795, although the volume of their trade was lower than usual.[14] The changed behaviour M'Gillivray

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[11]Morton, 45.

[12]Morton, 46.

[13]Morton, 70, 73.

[14]Morton, 73.

described occurred during the course of one season. The change was temporary.

Gros Blanc did not value a close relationship with traders. Instead he attempted to profit from the fur trade through confrontational tactics. Some Indians used such tactics successfully. Not all of them are explicitly connected to Gros Blanc, but a description of several of them will serve to illustrate how an aggressive trade strategy could be successful.

M'Gillivray mentioned that Gros Blanc's band did bargain relentlessly at fur trade posts. He did not mention how successful this tactic was, but other traders did. In 1809 Alexander Henry reported that "the Slaves are the most arrant beggars I saw; refusing them an article is to no purpose; they plague me as long as they can get within hearing... till I must either give them something or retire."[15] Indians also used subtle intimidation to increase their trade returns. In 1806, James Bird reported that twenty Blackfoot men who had visited Acton House "offered no manner of violence, tho' they beheaved [sic] in a less friendly & submissive manner than usual & Mr. Pruden was under the necessity of Trading articles from them of little value and paying them better than he would have done under other circumstances."[16]

Some took goods without payment. According to Henry, the Blackfoot and Blood were particularly given to "theft".[17] Of the Blood he wrote, "they are notorious thieves; every movable piece of metal must be put out of their sight and reach, as they will steal all they can lay hands upon."[18] In 1809 he expressed relief after some Blackfoot--many of them from Gros Blanc's band--had left Fort

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[15]Coues, 544; see also Coues, 730-1.

[16]HBCA B. 60/a.6, October 3, 1806.

[17]Coues, 731.

[18]Coues, 736.

Vermillion: "notwithstanding our precautions to prevent theft, we found they had purloined several axes, kettles, and other small articles. One of my men found that, in lieu of a new gun he had hung up in his house, the cover contained a stick, which must have been put in when the gun was taken away."[19] Some Indians even sold horses during the day, only to take them back at night.[20] Traders could rarely identify the culprits, and even when they could they had limited power to obtain redress. Thus, the incentive to take these goods must have been great. When such Indians left fur trade posts they would be able to trade stories of their exploits at the post while the traders double checked their horses, guns or other goods.

In order to benefit from a close relationship with traders, members of the Cold band would have to earn their trust. If band members could profit from aggressive behaviour at the posts, perhaps there was little incentive to earn the trust of traders. Instead their exploits at the trading posts could earn them respect among their peers.

Feathers behaved very differently. Perhaps he doubted the long-term benefits of Gros Blanc's policies. Instead, he chose to cultivate a friendly relationship between his band and the traders. It appears that both policies were rooted in Blackfoot self-interest, rather than any strong feeling concerning the traders. The traders themselves appeared to believe that the cooperation of Painted Feather's band would last only so long as it served their interests.[21] After Feathers made his promise to follow his father's friendly relations with traders, his name disappears from records and journals until 1800 when he appeared at Chesterfield House. There his band became trusted partners of the

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[19]Coues, 547.

[20]HBCA B. 34/a. 2, December 11, 1800.

[21]Such comments are common in traders' journals. One such comment made about Painted Feather's band specifically, is found in Coues, 576-7.

traders. The very fact that Chesterfield House was established in Blackfoot territory in 1800 gives clear evidence that Feathers's band had congenial relations with the traders before that time.

The founding of Chesterfield House could not have been carried out without considerable planning. The decision to build a post on the South Saskatchewan River would have been based on the assumption that a group of friendly Indians would have been willing to provide important supplies and services there. The role of homeguard Indians has already been discussed. Some Cree bands were employed as homeguard Indians at the North Saskatchewan River posts, but Chesterfield House was well outside Cree territory. At Chesterfield House, Feathers's band filled this role. The traders could not have trusted Big Man's band or the Atsina Indians who also traded at Chesterfield House. When the decision was made to build a post on the South Saskatchewan, the traders would have turned to Feathers.

It is possible that Feathers's band chose the exact site of Chesterfield House. The traders were unfamiliar with the area. In the fall of 1800 Fidler embarked up the South Saskatchewan River with the intention of building at the confluence of the Red Deer and Bad (South Saskatchewan) Rivers near present-day Empress, Alberta. At that time no white person had ever passed up the South Saskatchewan River beyond forty miles (sixty-five kilometres) above South Branch House.[22] Fidler's destination was over 200 kilometres farther upstream. The site was not ideal for traders as there was little suitable wood there.[23] On the other hand, the site was perfect for the Blackfoot. During the following two winters buffalo were usually plentiful near the post.

Chesterfield House was the site of three opposing posts during the 1800-01 season and two posts in the 1801-02 season. Since they were

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[22]Johnson, 253.

[23]Johnson, 268.

established in the middle of a largely treeless prairie where beaver returns would be only modest at best, it would be easy to assume that the posts were established as provisioning posts. Richard Ruggles has suggested as much for the Hudson's Bay Company post:

> By the time Fidler had passed down the Saskatchewan to Cumberland House in May 1800, plans had been made to build a post on the grassland plains. It had become necessary for the company to extend its own pemmican collection into the heart of this region because the Indians of this area were not willing to bring it north themselves. It was not a rich fur area, although some furs were obtained, especially fox.[24]

Ruggles maintains that the Indians of the region were unwilling to bring their products north. In fact the Indians who supplied meat and furs to Chesterfield House were the same Blackfoot that visited posts on the North Saskatchewan River before and after Chesterfield House was established. Docked Bull, a member of the Feathers's band and a post hunter at Chesterfield House in 1801 and 1802, traded at Buckingham House during the 1796-7 season.[25] Similarly, both Big Man and Feathers traded on the North Saskatchewan River before and after Chesterfield House was open. These Indians were willing to trade on the North Saskatchewan but, in mild winters such as 1799-1800 when buffalo stayed well south of the North Saskatchewan, it was inconvenient for the Blackfoot to bring provisions to the posts.[26]

Was Chesterfield House a provisioning post? Production of pemmican at the post was significant. Fidler had over sixty seventy-five pound bags of pemmican made in the 1800-01 season, a season during which posts on the North Saskatchewan had suffered shortages.[27] Even

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[24]Richard Ruggles, *A Country So Interesting: The Hudson's Bay Company and Two Centuries of Mapping, 1670-1870* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1991), 63.

[25]HBCA B. 49/a.27[b], January 11, 1797.

[26]Johnson, lxx. During cold winters buffalo would be more likely to seek out the more wooded country of near the North Saskatchewan River.

[27]Johnson, 286, 287, lxxxiv.

more pemmican was produced in the 1801-02 season. Yet, neither the Company nor Fidler put much emphasis on pemmican production. During the 1801-02 season Fidler and Company officials must have been aware of the post's potential as a source of provisions. In the light of the chronic shortages at other posts, it is striking that from October 27, 1801, to March 20, 1802, Fidler was turning down dry provisions because he had filled his quota of eighty bags of pemmican.[28] It was not until late March, after he learned that provisions were in short supply on the North Saskatchewan River, that he again began accumulating dried meat.[29] Similarly, after post hunters and other Indians supplied seventy three cows in December, he stopped accepting fresh meat in January 1802.[30]

Peter Fidler was clearly more concerned with accumulating furs than provisions during his stay at Chesterfield House. Ruggles implied that fur returns at Chesterfield House were modest, but in both seasons more furs were brought to York Factory from Chesterfield House than from any other fort. In fact during the first season its fur returns of 12 000 MB nearly equalled the returns of all the North Saskatchewan posts.[31] In the margins of his rough journal, Fidler kept running totals of fur returns, but not of his trade in provisions, indicating a concern with furs rather than provisions.[32] Despite its potential as a provisions post, the Hudson's Bay Company viewed Chesterfield House as a source of furs.

Interestingly the North West Company appears to have been the first Company to decide to establish a post far up the South

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[28]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 27, 1801.

[29]HBCA B. 39/a.2, March 20, 1802.

[30]HBCA B. 39/a.2, December 29, 30, 1801.

[31]Johnson, lxxxvi, lxxxiv, xciii, Appendix A.

[32]HBCA B. 39/a.2, passim.

Saskatchewan River.[33] It is impossible to determine the North West Company's aspirations for this post. We have seen that the Company had few problems meeting its pemmican needs. William Tomison, Chief of Inland Trade for the Hudson's Bay Company, assumed that the North West Company's move was merely an attempt to divert its opposition away from the more lucrative north.[34] It is also possible that Chesterfield House was part of an elaborate plan to build a series of posts to the Pacific. Whatever reasons the North West Company and the XY Company had for establishing posts there, it is likely that they were more intent on collecting provisions than the Hudson's Bay Company was. When Fidler turned down provisions, he directed Indian traders to the XY Company post.[35]

Peter Fidler's party was the first to reach the site of Chesterfield House in the autumn of 1801. The traders apparently anticipated difficulty with Indians, for the North West Company's Pierre Belleau and Peter Fidler agreed to build their posts within the same stockade so that their men could help each other in the event of Indian attack.[36] The nearby XY Company's post was headed by John Wills. The North West Company abandoned its post in the spring of 1801, leaving the XY Company and the Hudson's Bay Company to compete during the second year.

The traders had reason to expect trouble with Indians. Large numbers of Indians visited the post. Fidler estimated that at least 1400 Indians were at Chesterfield House at one time in October 1801,

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[33]Johnson, xcii.

[34]Johnson, xcii.

[35]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 27, 1801; Hbca B. 34/a.3, December 31, 1801.

[36]Johnson, lxxxvi.

when the total population of company men was thirty nine.[37] Furthermore, A kas kin the "great chief" of the Atsina, apparently still bore a grudge for the death of his brother, L'Homme de Callumet, at the hands of the North West Company men in 1794.[38]

During the second year the traders' anticipation of difficulty with Indians became a reality. Fidler's journals are the only surviving records of these posts. They reveal that during much of the second season the presence of the Atsina caused tension and uncertainty among the traders. As in 1793 and 1794, Atsina hostility in 1802 seems to have been rooted in their disadvantages in the trade. Up to 1800 the Atsina had experienced the hostility of the Cree and the Assiniboine, and on occasion the Blackfoot. They could not or chose not to acquire the same numbers of valuable furs as their Cree and Assiniboine enemies. They appear to have attempted to make up for this deficiency by taking particular care to produce top quality finished skins.[39] Still, the traders continued to look upon the Atsina with suspicion.

The Atsina appear to have attacked traders, not from a position of strength, but from one of weakness. Traders became targets when a weakened Atsina could not defend themselves from competing enemies. The immediate cause of the 1802 attacks, like the 1793 and 1794 attacks, seems to have been a series of crises in Atsina society. In 1800-01, a hundred Atsina, mostly young people, died as a result of the smallpox virus which they contracted from the Arapaho. Then during the summer of 1801, the Cree and Assiniboine attacked them twice, once on the Oldman River and once in the Cypress Hills. Seventy six men, women and children were killed and over a hundred horses were stolen in these

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[37]HBCA B. 34/a.3, October 2, 1801; There were forty one men at the posts by March, HBCA B. 34/a.3, March 4, 1802.

[38]HBCA B. 34/a.3, March 8, 1802.

[39]HBCA B. 34/a.2, December 1, 1800; Johnson, 316. The Atsina were still remembered for this in 1811, Coues, 734.

attacks.[40] A sudden and violent blizzard killed at least two more men and eighty horses in January 1802.[41] In February 1802, reeling from the losses, they killed ten Iroquois and two Canadians who were nearing the North West Company post at Chesterfield House in order to trap and took their supplies of guns and ammunition.[42] These killings, the exhibition of the scalps and the threats to attack the posts, led John Wills to abandon the XY Company's fort and spend the rest of the season within the Hudson's Bay Company's fort. While the traders felt secure within the stockades the departure of the canoes in late April was attended with much trepidation.

Chesterfield House journals are significant because Peter Fidler's detailed records, particularly of the second season, show that, once given the opportunity, Feathers's band quickly adopted a homeguard role at the post. In this way a relatively intense and mutually beneficial relationship grew between the traders and the members of Feathers's band. At the same time Big Man's band remained only minimally committed to the fur trade.

During these two seasons Big Man's band and Feathers's band were not only following different trading strategies but each band was clearly developing its own pattern of movement and behaviour. As has been observed earlier, Fidler was able to distinguish between members of Feathers's "gang" and of Big Man's "gang".[43] He recorded the movements

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[40]HBCA E. 3/2, September 20, 1800; B. 34/a.3, October 3, 1801; Johnson, 309.

[41]Johnson, 309.

[42]Johnson, 309; HBCA B. 34/a.3, October 3, 1801; HBCA E. 3/2, September 20, 1800. Fidler seems to have anticipated the attack for much of the winter. He sent tobacco to Peigan war chief, Cotton a haw pe (Kootanae Appe) apparently in hopes that the Peigan would come to his aid, HBCA B. 39/a.2, January 15, 1802, March 8, 1802. A crisis among the Atsina in 1811 appears to have encouraged them to attack traders again. Upset by treatment at the hands of traders, and by defeat at the hands of the Crow, the Atsina resolved to attack Rocky Mountain House but were dissuaded by the Peigan, Coues, 720-1.

[43]HBCA B. 39/a.2, March 25, 1802, fo. 22d.

of these bands during the second season. While Big Man's band appears to have spent much of the winter at quite a distance from Chesterfield House, Feathers's band spent much of the season very near the posts.

Fidler rarely mentioned individual Indians in his journals of 1800-01, but his 1801-02 journals make it possible to determine that Feathers had camped near Chesterfield House in 1800-01.[44] Fidler's careful notes of the 1801-02 season make it possible to trace the movements of Feathers during that winter. Around October 6, 1801, Feathers left Island House on the North Saskatchewan River bearing a message for Fidler at Chesterfield House over 300 kilometres to the south. On October 26,1801, Feathers and the members of his band arrived at Chesterfield House. From that time until mid April members of this band remained near Chesterfield House, providing diverse services to the traders. Although Feathers moved his tents often during the winter he was always camped nearby. Several times he camped at the post. At other times his tents were "five miles off", "not above 1/2 Days Journey off", or twenty miles down the South Saskatchewan River.[45] During the time the Hudson's Bay Company was accepting provisions, Feathers and several members of his band became regular suppliers of buffalo meat and fat. Even when Fidler was turning down most supplies of meat, he still sought occasional supplies of such delicacies as fresh buffalo tongue from members of Feathers's band.[46] The provisioning role was not new to this band as the Blackfoot had served as provisioners at various posts since the 1780s. More interesting, however, were the specialized services which Feathers's band provided.

Feathers visited Chesterfield House often, at least seven times during the winter of 1801-02. He traded provisions and furs frequently,

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[44]HBCA B. 39/a.2, December 25, 1801.

[45]Johnson, 297; HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 26, 1801, March 10, 1802, November 27, 1801, January 10, 1802.

[46]HBCA B. 39/a.2, January 8, 10, 1802.

but with the exception of the occasion on which Feathers carried a message from Island House or drew maps, Fidler never indicated that Feathers himself performed special services for the Company. Yet other men certainly acted in roles such as post hunters, guides, interpreters and intermediaries. Older Blackfoot men did not normally hunt or trap the products traded to traders.[47] Nevertheless, Henry indicated that "to the young men we pay no particular attention, all our transactions being with the elders."[48] Band leaders were important spokesmen for their bands even if their personal production of fur and provisions was modest. Fidler was always informed where Feathers was and he frequently presented Feathers with gifts. He also presented Feathers with a special chief's coat given only to Feathers and A kas kin--the most important chiefs among the Blackfoot and Atsina according to Fidler.[49] Whatever role Feathers assumed, it seems that Fidler saw him as the most important person in terms of maintaining positive relations between the Blackfoot and the traders.

Whatever role Feathers played toward the traders he certainly played an important role in maintaining peaceful relations with neighbouring Indian bands. Indians of several tribal designations visited Chesterfield House. The majority of visitors were Blackfoot or Atsina, but they also included parties of Arapaho, Iroquois, Blood and Peigan. A band of Arapaho Indians spent the 1801-02 season near the fort. They came from "the Red Deers River [Yellowstone] beyond the Big River [Missouri], far to the southeast of Chesterfield House.[50] While the Atsina welcomed the Arapaho as friends and relatives they resented

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[47]HBCA B. 34/a.3, January 8, 1802.

[48]Coues, 541.

[49]HBCA B. 39/a.2, January 30, 1802.

[50]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 30, 1801.

the Iroquois as intruders.[51]

Since Feathers's band would come into frequent contact with all of these Indians peaceful relations with them were vital. This meant that conflicts were dealt with quickly. Immediately upon arrival at Chesterfield House in the autumn of 1801, Feathers "gave the fall [Atsina] Indians 2 good horses for the body of the two fall Ind[ians]s his son killed the last february."[52] The gesture appears to have reconciled the parties for in December two Atsina told Fidler that they intended to camp with Feathers.[53] Apparently some of the Iroquois that were killed by Atsina also had a friendly visit with Feathers shortly before they were killed.[54] Thus while tensions among traders and Indians were high, Feathers appears to have maintained peaceful relations between his band and the various parties that visited the post.

While Feathers's role appears to have been diplomatic several members of his band performed other vital services for the traders. None of these men are mentioned in journals apart from those of Peter Fidler. Together they served as hunters, guides, couriers, herdsmen, interpreters, intermediaries, and even watchmen and cartographers. Of these men a man identified as Little Bear (Ki oo cus, Ke oo cuss) is mentioned particularly often. Fidler described Little Bear as a Blackfoot Chief.[55] Little Bear appears to have camped near Chesterfield House longer than any other Indian during the 1800-02 season. Fidler

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[51]The Iroquois, who were first brought to the west by the North West Company, were initially accepted by most Plains Indians but were met with immediate Atsina hostility, Theodore J. Karamanski, "The Iroquois and the Fur Trade of the Far West" *The Beaver* 307 (4) (Spring, 1982): 6.

[52]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 31, 1801.

[53]HBCA B. 39/a.2, December, 18, 1801.

[54]Compare HBCA E. 3/2, September 20, 1800, and HBCA B. 39/a.2, February, 1802.

[55]HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 105.

recorded that he bought a horse from Little Bear on October 13, two weeks before Feathers arrived at the post.[56] He also stayed at Chesterfield House until April 15, almost two weeks longer than other Blackfoot. An examination of Little Bear's activities will highlight the important contribution Feathers's band made at Chesterfield House.

One of the most prominent roles of the Blackfoot at Chesterfield House was that of post hunter. Post hunters agreed to furnish provisions to the post for a few weeks at a time. A few post employees would accompany the hunter and transport the meat to the post and supplies to the hunter's tent. During the two seasons all three Companies at Chesterfield House hired Blackfoot Indians in this capacity although Fidler did not identify all of them by name. It appears that each Company had a tendency to hire the same men repeatedly. Little Bear, who served as hunter for both the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company, seems to have been a favourite hunter.[57] Aside from Little Bear, Docked Bull served as a hunter for the Hudson's Bay Company. Docked Bull, however, appears to have been a poor hunter.[58] Little Bear was obviously well regarded by the traders. During part of the winter of 1802 Little Bear was asked to take care of the Hudson's Bay Company's horses as "they kept two men constantly looking after them."[59] When the traders embarked in spring he was hired to deliver horses to the North Saskatchewan River.[60]

The Blackfoot also provided important services as guides. During the first season, traders of the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company searched for a source of pitch with which to waterproof their

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[56]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 13, 1801.

[57]Little Bear was sometimes identified as Belleus [Belleau's] hunter, HBCA B. 34/a.2, December 4, 1801.

[58]HBCA B. 34/a.3, November 21, 1801, December 4, 1801.

[59]Johnson, 306.

[60]HBCA B. 39/a.2, April 21, 1802.

boats. Unsuccessful, they turned to two Blackfoot men who led the white men to the nearest evergreen forests. They were the first Europeans to see the "I e kim me coo Hill"--the Cypress Hills.[61] In 1802 Little Bear was hired to guide men to these hills once again.[62]

Occasionally Indians were hired to guide white men between Chesterfield House and the North Saskatchewan River.[63] It appears that white men were unsafe on the prairie without escort, particularly if they were carrying trade goods.[64] On several occasions Blackfoot Men were hired to carry letters between the two rivers. In February 1802 Ak ko wee ak was hired to carry messages to the North Saskatchewan River and back. He returned in a month with the traders' letters and the information that provisions were extremely low on the North Saskatchewan River.[65] In April 1802 Little Bear was paid to carry messages to the North Saskatchewan River.[66] On one occasion two North West Company men became impatient with their Blackfoot guide and attempted to make the return trip themselves. Overwhelmed by a blizzard on their return to Chesterfield House six weeks later, the men lost their toes to frostbite. Had they not been rescued by Little Bear they may have perished. Fidler attributed their misfortune to their lack of a guide.[67]

Blackfoot of Feathers's "gang" also acted as interpreters and mediators between the traders and the Atsina. Apparently none of the

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[61]HBCA B. 34/a.2, March 4, 1801; HBCA B. 34/a.3, December 4, 1801; Johnson, 302n.

[62]HBCA B. 34/a.2, December 4, 1801.

[63]HBCA B. 34/a.2, October 19, 1800; November 30, 1800.

[64]Johnson, 278.

[65]HBCA B. 39/a.2, February 17, 1802, March 20, 1802.

[66]HBCA B. 39/a.2, April 4, 1802.

[67]Johnson, 308-9.

Hudson's Bay Company traders knew the Atsina language fluently. Fidler noted one occasion when he asked a Blackfoot to serve as an Atsina interpreter.[68] In March 1802 Little Bear served as a mediator between the traders and the Atsina. After killing ten Iroquois and two Nor'Westers, the Atsina had proudly displayed their victims' scalps. While they indicated their desire to kill any trader they could the Atsina accepted Little Bear's attempts at mediation. In April Little Bear was "detained till we should embark, to look about and see if the Fall Indians are lurking anywhere nigh us."[69] After he was able to determine that the Atsina had left the region Little Bear left.[70]

The most fascinating contribution made by the Blackfoot at Chesterfield House is revealed in the maps they drew for Peter Fidler. While historians recognize the important part that Indians have had in all European "discoveries" in North America, perhaps no example illustrates this debt more clearly than the maps preserved by Peter Fidler. Without leaving Chesterfield House Fidler was able to acquire detailed maps and information covering the area from the North Saskatchewan River to the Yellowstone River and between Chesterfield House and the Rocky Mountains, as well as vague information of rivers to the west of the mountains as far as the Pacific Ocean. Several maps covered the area of present-day Alberta. Ak ko wee ak's map of 1802 is a detailed map of the Bow and Oldman River drainage, including such lesser features as the Belly Buttes, Porcupine Hills, and minor rivers as the Little Bow, Castle and Highwood Rivers. The map is striking for its detail of features in and near the Rocky Mountains, an area outside

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[68]HBCA B. 39/a.2, December 9, 1801.

[69]Johnson, 320.

[70]Johnson, 321.

the normal territory of the Blackfoot bands.[71]

A map drawn by the Little Bear in 1802 depicted rivers and landmarks from Buckingham House to the Yellowstone River.[72] It demonstrated his intimate knowledge of the country. It not only depicted major rivers and landmarks but such relatively minor water courses as Sounding Creek in Alberta and the Marias River in Montana, lakes such as Manito Lake in Saskatchewan and Buffalo and Pakowki Lakes in Alberta, landmarks such as Ground Squirrel Hill north of the Hand Hills, and Milk River Ridge south of Lethbridge and the Sweetgrass Hills and the Bearspaw Mountains in Montana. It also indicates daily camping sites for a hypothetical (or actual) journey from Buckingham House to the Yellowstone River via Chesterfield House and from the Yellowstone River to the Bow River via the Sweetgrass Hills. These maps would have made a significant contribution to the traders' knowledge of the country; however, their impact is overshadowed by the importance of two maps which Feathers provided. The extent to which Fidler shared these maps with fellow traders is not known.

Feathers drew two maps for Fidler, one in February 1801 and the other in February 1802. The first depicted the Missouri/Yellowstone River basin. It included features from the Milk River in the north to the Big Horn River in the South.[73] It showed important mountains used as landmarks by the Blackfoot, from Devil's Head Mountain west of Calgary, to a landmark as far south as Wyoming. It showed the Snake and

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[71]HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 103d; published in Judith Hudson Beattie, "Indian Maps in the Hudson's Bay Company Archives: A Comparison of Five Area Maps Recorded by Peter Fidler, 1801-1802," *Archivaria* 21 (Winter, 1985-86): 171. A rough copy appears in HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 92d. These maps show the location of the Cree/Assiniboine attack on the Atsina on the Oldman River in 1801.

[72]HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 105; published in Ruggles, plate 20, and *Historical Atlas of Canada* vol. 1, *From the Beginning to 1800* edited by R. Cole Harris. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), plate 59; Beattie, 172. A rough copy appears in HBCA B. 39/a.2, fos. 85d-86.

[73]HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 107; published in Beattie, 169.

Columbia Rivers as well as the location of Indian peoples on both sides of the Rocky Mountains. The second map provided less detail of a similar area.[74]

Fidler realized the significance of this information. He drew a map derived from Feathers's maps and from conversations with Feathers.[75] Acknowledging his source, he sent this map to Company officials in London who passed it on to the famed cartographer Aaron Arrowsmith. Arrowsmith incorporated the information into his 1803 map of North America.[76] It was not the Hudson's Bay Company which made the best use of this new information, but it was Lewis and Clark who used Arrowsmith's map to guide them to the headwaters of the Missouri in 1805-06.[77] Unwittingly Feathers helped guide the first Americans to Blackfoot territory and a generation of bloody conflict between the Blackfoot Confederacy and American trappers followed.

Fidler's journals reveal the intense and important relationship that developed between the Blackfoot and traders at Chesterfield House. Clearly these Indians and traders did not approach one another with indifference. Some of the services which the Blackfoot provided were beyond the ability of company employees. Others would have required considerably more manpower, time, risk and expense. Naturally the Blackfoot had no part in guiding the traders by water to and from the site of Chesterfield House--the Blackfoot were not canoeists. Nevertheless Feathers's bands provided the invaluable services at

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[74]HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 104. A rough copy appears in HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 93; published in Beattie, 170. Another map provided by an unidentified Atsina man appears in HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 106; Beattie, 168.

[75]Published versions of this map appear in D. W. Moodie and Barry Kaye, "The Ac Ko Mok Ki Map" in *The Beaver* 307 (4) (Spring, 1977): 6-7; Ruggles, plate 19; William Brandon, *The American Heritage Book of Indians* ([New York]: American Heritage Publishing, 1961), 324-5; and *Historical Atlas*, plate 59.

[76]Dempsey, "A-ca-oo-mah-ca-ye"; Moodie, 10.

[77]Moodie, 11.

Chesterfield House which homeguard Indians did at other trading posts.

It is difficult to evaluate the benefits which Feathers's band enjoyed as a result of their homeguard role. Fidler's rough notes offer some useful figures describing now much he paid for various services. These figures give an incomplete impression of how the band was rewarded. They suggest that members of the band had access to a considerably greater amount of European goods than either Big Man's band or the Atsina. Since the Blackfoot lived a nomadic existence the accumulation of material wealth was limited. Modest demands for European tools could be met fairly easily, but individuals did not trade simply to meet personal requirements or wants. A man could enhance his prestige by showing generosity. Thus once modest personal needs were met an individual could acquire many items, including luxuries, which he could share with members of his band. In this way members of Feathers's band enjoyed significant benefits as a result of their homeguard role at Chesterfield House.

Evidence of Big Man's two visits to Chesterfield House suggest that he traded about eighty MB in furs and provisions at Chesterfield House in the 1801-02 season.[78] Members of Feathers's band were in a position to acquire much more. Ak ko wee ak was paid fifty MB for his trip to the North Saskatchewan River.[79] Various indications of payments made to Little Bear show that he earned a great deal more than Big Man. He traded proportionally higher amounts of such goods as ammunition, flints, knives, awls and steels and convenience items such as tobacco, alcohol, paints, wrist bands and bells. The fact that on one occasion he bought 8 1/2 pounds of tobacco, 7 flints, 11 knives and 4 awls suggests that much of this trade was distributed to band members.[80]

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[78]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 24, 1801, March 2, 1802.

[79]HBCA B. 39/a.2, February 17, 1802.

[80]HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 96.

Thus, while members of Big Man's band may have derived much of their status from their acknowledged acts of bravery, members of Feathers's band appear to have been better positioned to improve their status through acts of generosity.

Big Man's band responded to the opportunities at Chesterfield House very differently. In 1800-01 a large part of the Blackfoot visited Chesterfield House only in October and March.[81] There is no evidence that they visited Island House during that season.[82] These Blackfoot may have included significant numbers of Big Man's band as his band exhibited similar movements the following year. Big Man's band spent much of the 1801-02 winter some distance from Chesterfield House. At one point Fidler noted that the band had gone to the North Saskatchewan River area although its members continued to trade at Chesterfield House.[83] It is likely that they also traded at posts on the North Saskatchewan River that year. Big Man himself visited the Chesterfield House only twice, in October and in March. Fidler recorded visits of two other parties from his band, one in December and one in January.[84] In both cases the visits were brief, a day or two in duration. Big Man's band appears to have preferred a much less extensive trading relationship than Feathers's band did.

Big Man's band seems to have had a stormy relationship with the Atsina. In October 1800, a large Blackfoot band, possibly Big Man's band, approached Chesterfield House to trade but waited some distance from the post until a party of Atsina had left the post.[85] Both times

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[81]HBCA B. 34/a.2, March 19, 1801.

[82]Island House Post Journals show Blackfoot visits only in September and October, HBCA B. 92/a.1. No other post journals from relevant North Saskatchewan River posts for that year have survived.

[83]HBCA B. 39/a.2, November 7, 1801.

[84]HBCA B. 39/a.2, December 5, 1801, January 12, 1802.

[85]HBCA B. 34/a.2, October 24, 1800. It is very likely that this was Big Man's gang, see HBCA B. 34/a.2, March 19, 1801.

when Big Man accompanied members of his band to Chesterfield House in 1801-02, his band became the focus of considerable Atsina hostility. In late October when the band met a party of Arapaho, they attacked and pillaged them, leaving a man, a woman and two children dead.[86] The Arapaho's Atsina hosts and friends clearly wanted revenge. On November 1, 1801, Big Man presented gifts to them but by November 7 Fidler recorded that the entire band had left the area in fear of Atsina revenge.[87] When Big Man's band arrived on March 1, 1802, tensions at Chesterfield House were peaking. The Atsina, numbering over 600 warriors, were camped within a mile of Chesterfield House. They had already killed two Iroquois and mutilated their bodies. When Big Man's band arrived in this charged atmosphere "The Tattood [Arapaho] Indians [were] all assembled about the house with guns etc. to kill some of the Blackfeet...."[88] Once again Big Man presented gifts; however, it appears that the band left Chesterfield House quickly. They had certainly left by March 10, for at that time the only Blackfoot tents within five miles of Chesterfield House were those of Feathers's "gang".[89] The only subsequent reference to Big Man's band was Fidler's note that he had been informed that Big Man's "gang" would not return to Chesterfield House that season.[90]

Chesterfield House was not a safe place for Big Man's band, but there is no evidence that Big Man aspired to spend more than a minimal amount of time at the post. His band appears to have viewed visits to the fur trade post as necessary inconveniences. They approached the post in large well-armed parties. Encounters with unfamiliar Indian

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[86]HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 28, 1801.

[87]Johnson, 299, HBCA B. 39/a.2, November 7, 1801.

[88]Johnson, 313. In HBCA B. 39/a.2, March 1, 1802, Fidler mentions that this hostility was aimed at Big Man's band specifically.

[89]HBCA B. 39/a.2, March 10, 1802.

[90]HBCA B. 39/a.2, March 25, 1802.

bands were seen as opportunities for plunder. For the seventy five MB worth of furs which Big Man brought to Chesterfield House on March 2, 1802, he was given a variety of goods, including not only ammunition, knives, awls, and flints, but luxuries such as tobacco, liquor, beads, wrist bands, rings and paint.[91] Evidently Big Man's modest investment in the fur trade was meeting his desires. Feathers appears to have traded a greater volume of goods at Chesterfield House, but the limited evidence suggests that his proportionate consumption of essentials versus luxuries was similar to that of Big Man.

In one significant respect there was no obvious difference between the behaviour of Feathers's band and Big Man's band between 1793 and 1805. Both bands sent raiding parties against Indians that lived south and west of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Fidler's journals show that during both seasons several parties of Blackfoot left Chesterfield House with the intention of making war against the Shoshoni. One of Feathers's maps indicates that one of these parties crossed the Continental Divide in search of the Shoshoni in 1800.[92] Warfare was an important part of Blackfoot culture as bravery in warfare and success in horse raiding were primary means by which young men achieved social standing. Feathers's band appears to have focused aggression on the Shoshoni, Flathead and Crow who were rich in horses but who did not visit Saskatchewan River fur trade posts. This band waged war in a manner that did not threaten its access to fur trade posts.

Chesterfield House was a boon to Feathers's band. The band clearly had the trust of the traders and the friendship of neighbouring Indians. It enjoyed more secure access to European goods than the other Blackfoot band. Its position was dependent on its ability to accommodate the interests of traders and neighbouring Indians, but its

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[91]HBCA B. 39/a.2, fo. 93d.

[92]HBCA E. 3/2, fo. 107.

access to weaponry would have made it a daunting military force to any band that considered aggression.

The Atsina attack convinced traders to abandon Chesterfield House in the spring of 1802. John McDonald of Garth's "Autobiographical Notes" suggest that North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company traders were at the site during the 1804-05 season, but these notes, written when McDonald was in his eighties, contain many errors. McDonald's "Notes" probably refer to the 1800-01 season.[93]

Having a post within their territory would have been to the advantage of all the Blackfoot, but the closing of the posts at Chesterfield House would have been a greater disappointment to Feathers than it would have been to Big Man. Feathers's band lost their homeguard role at Chesterfield House without the prospect of a similar role at the North Saskatchewan River posts. Big Man had much the same role at Chesterfield House as he had at North Saskatchewan posts. If either man hoped that his band would be able to resume trade at North Saskatchewan River posts under the same circumstances as they had before 1800, they would soon be disappointed. The establishment of Chesterfield House encouraged the Blackfoot to camp in the river valleys far to the south of the North Saskatchewan. As a result, any Cree bands that were pushing south of the North Saskatchewan may have felt little Blackfoot resistance during these two years. When Chesterfield House was abandoned the Blackfoot may have wished to return to wintering sites near the North Saskatchewan River, only to find Cree bands reluctant to relinquish them. Whatever the cause, deteriorating relations with the Cree became the major factor affecting Blackfoot involvement in the fur trade between 1805 and 1814.

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[93]Terry Smythe, "Thematic Study of the Fur Trade in the Canadian West: 1670-1870", Ottawa: Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 1968, 199.

CHAPTER 4
ON THE NORTH SASKATCHEWAN, 1806-1814

After Chesterfield House was abandoned, fur trade posts on the North Saskatchewan once again became the only source of European goods for the Blackfoot. Circumstances in this region after 1805, however, would not be as those before. Most significantly, Blackfoot relations with the Cree and Assiniboine--strained before 1800--would become much more volatile after 1806. The troubled relations between various Indians that traded at the Saskatchewan River posts became the dominant factor affecting Blackfoot trade relations between 1805 and 1814. At any time, the Cree could threaten Blackfoot access to the posts. At the same time it became ever more difficult to keep peace between Cree and Assiniboine bands and other Plains Indians such as the Atsina, Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan and Sarcee. As a result the Blackfoot bands appear to have found it ever more difficult to participate in the fur trade.

While some Blackfoot bands may have contributed to disturbances in the North Saskatchewan River region after 1805 the Cree and Assiniboine seem to have been the main instigators in difficulties between themselves and the Blackfoot Confederacy. The Blackfoot Confederacy was relatively well supplied with horses before 1794.[1] The climate of their territory ensured a lower mortality among their horses than among those of the Cree and Assiniboine.[2] Furthermore Indians such as the Crow, Shoshoni and Flathead had large herds of horses. The Blackfoot Confederacy frequently raided for horses from these Indians. Well supplied as they were,the Blackfoot stole few horses from traders at this time.[3] In fact the Blackfoot Confederacy would have been the main

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[1]Burpee, "York Factory", 338; E. 3/2, January 10, 1793; Coues, 526.

[2]Ray, *Indians*, 159-62.

[3]Coues, 526.

suppliers of horses for European traders and other Indians in the Saskatchewan River area.[4] Meanwhile the Plains Cree and Assiniboine appear to have been chronically poor in horses.[5] As bands of Cree and Assiniboine, many of whom had been middlemen in the fur trade, turned to horses rather than canoes for transportation,the Blackfoot, Atsina and the traders became natural targets for Cree and Assiniboine horse raids. The Cree and Assiniboine became known as the most troublesome horse thieves on the northern plains.[6] As a result Henry concluded "the Crees have always been the aggressors in their disturbances with the Slaves."[7] Cree and Assiniboine raids were naturally met with Blackfoot retaliation.[8] Painted Feather may have wished for peace with the Cree and Assiniboine, but he would have been unable to prevent their raids, and neither he nor his band would have been willing to ignore them. As the Cree and Assiniboine continued to raid the Blackfoot for horses, the Blackfoot retaliated and tensions inevitably increased.

Until 1806, it seems that only minor and sporadic violence punctuated generally peaceful relations between the Cree and Assiniboine and the Blackfoot Confederacy. The summer of 1806 was a turning point in these relations. In July of that year a combined party of Cree, Assiniboine and Blackfoot which had embarked on a campaign against the Atsina, disintegrated into a battle between the Blackfoot and the Cree and Assiniboine.[9] With about twenty eight of their warriors killed, the

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[4]Glover, 49; HBCA B. 39/a.2, October 13, 1801; Coues, 542.

[5]E. 3/2, January 10, 1792; Glover, 267.

[6]Coues, 512-13, 517; Glover, 267; W.K. Lamb, ed., *Sixteen Years in the Indian Country: The Journal of Daniel Williams Harmon, 1800-1816* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 213.

[7]Coues, 540.

[8]See Glover, 267.

[9]Apparently the incident arose from an argument over the ownership of a horse, Lamb, 100; HBCA B. 60/a.6, August 25, 1806.

Blackfoot "threatened indiscriminate revenge" against the Cree.[10] This threat left the Cree "flying in all directions to conceal themselves in the woods".[11] In September 1806, the Blackfoot got their revenge in attacking a party of about twenty five Cree who were unaware of the earlier conflict. The bloodshed had repercussions for the Blackfoot, the Cree, and the traders. The battle had apparently left the Blackfoot "masters of the Plains from South Branch to Acton House".[12] Cree hunters did not dare to move onto the plains.[13] At the same time, the Blackfoot were afraid to visit the fur trade posts. In September, a party visited Acton House, but in December James Bird reported that after September "we have had no certain intelligence of them. It is doubtful whether they will visit the Houses this season & should this be the case few Wolves and Kitts can be expected."[14] Thus in 1806 the Cree were cut off from the plains, the Blackfoot from the trading posts, and the traders from their regular sources of provisions. During that winter traders at Fort Edmonton were forced to subsist on fish brought from sixty miles away.[15]

James Bird's prediction that the Blackfoot would not visit the fort proved correct. He recorded no visits of Peigan, Blood or Blackfoot at Fort Edmonton until April 7, 1807. Even the Atsina and Sarcee apparently did not visit Edmonton. When Bird described their April visit he implied that the Blackfoot had not visited other fur

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[10]HBCA B. 60/a.6, August 25, 1806.

[11]HBCA B. 60/a.6, August 25, 1806.

[12]HBCA B. 60/a.6, letter from James Bird to John McNab, December 23, 1806.

[13]HBCA B. 60/a.6, letter from James Bird to Peter Fidler, December 23, 1806.

[14]HBCA B. 60/a.6, letter from James Bird to John McNab, December 23, 1806.

[15]HBCA B. 60/a.6, letter from James Bird to John McNab, December 23, 1806.

trade posts during that year:

> A few Blackfeet arrived, among them was their principal Chief, a man who has long been remarkable for his attachment to white Men, & his friendship for the Cree, this Man tells us that his Country Men all wish sincerely for Peace that Having been long accustomed to be supplied with Brandy, Tobacco &c these articles are become objects of primary necessity to them, & nothing but absolute Danger can prevent them coming, to procure them as usual. Conceiving himself to be beloved by the Crees, he says, he has come therefore to ascertain their sentiments towards his countrymen in general and if these should [?] favourable, we may expect to see all the Blackfoot here before the departure of the Canoes.[16]

James Bird did not identify his Blackfoot visitor by name, but his description of the man's status and reputation, and the remarkable similarity between this description and Bird's eulogy of Feathers written in 1814, leave little doubt that this man was Feathers.[17] This Blackfoot chief's behaviour was consistent with Feathers's behaviour both before and after 1806.

This party of Blackfoot seems to have been able to negotiate a peace on behalf of a large part of the Blackfoot. The band left Fort Edmonton on April 8, 1807 "seemingly satisfied of the pacific wishes of the Crees".[18] When they left they informed the traders that a party of Blackfoot, Blood and Atsina would soon be in to trade. On May 10 a band of Blackfoot and Blood did arrive at Edmonton. They reported that they had spent the winter near the Spanish settlements far to the south.[19] At the beginning of the following season regular visits of the Atsina, Sarcee, Blood, Peigan and Blackfoot resumed.

The 1807 peace treaty was a notable accomplishment, but peace was short lived. After 1806 peace between the Blackfoot Confederacy and the

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[16]HBCA B. 60/a.6, April 7, 1807.

[17]This eulogy will be quoted and discussed later.

[18]HBCA B. 60/a.6, April 8, 1807.

[19]HBCA B. 60/a.6, May 10, 1807. Thompson believed that the Blackfoot Confederacy raided as far south as the Spanish settlements as early as 1788, Glover, 269.

Cree and Assiniboine was continually broken by a succession of violent incidents. It is likely that recorded instances of such warfare represent only a part of the actual violence. The Blackfoot and Cree, however, appear to have maintained a tenuous state of peace between April 1807 and the summer of 1808. During that summer some Cree killed three Peigan. The Peigan retaliated by killing four Cree.[20] This led to a rumour that the Cree were planning to blockade the North Saskatchewan River west of the Battle River in order to prevent the Blackfoot from getting any guns or ammunition.[21] If the Cree ever had such plans the blockade was never attempted. Never again were the Blackfoot so completely cut off from fur trade posts as they were in the 1806-07 season.

The Peigan-Cree incident of 1808 was not the only violent incident that summer. Painted Feather's band also became involved in conflict with the Cree. During the summer of 1808 a Blackfoot individual was left with some Cree "for the purpose of cementing the peace" which had apparently been established between them.[22] This Blackfoot was apparently shot by a young Cree near Paint River House.[23] As James Bird travelled up the North Saskatchewan River on his way to Edmonton that fall he stopped at Paint River House. Painted Feather was there with part of his band.[24] Bird noted that this band sought revenge against the Cree for this killing.[25] Alexander Henry the Younger who spent the entire winter at Fort Vermilion did not note any violence between Cree and Blackfoot. Perhaps they had resolved this issue peacefully.

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[20]Coues, 495, 540.

[21]Coues, 495.

[22]HBCA B. 60/a.8, September 3, 1808.

[23]HBCA B. 60/a.8, September 3, 1808.

[24]see Coues, 506.

[25]HBCA B. 60/a.8, September 14, 1808.

Frequent clashes between the Cree and Blackfoot and between the Assiniboine and Blackfoot ensured that relations remained strained. As a result trading posts became dangerous places for all Indians. Tensions discouraged Cree from venturing onto the plains and limited their ability to serve as post hunters near the posts or south of the North Saskatchewan River.[26] When Blackfoot and Cree camped near the fort at the same time traders viewed the situation as dangerous.[27] Traders occasionally had to mediate between conflicting Cree and Blackfoot bands when they were at the post.[28] When a camp of Blackfoot including Painted Feather was near Fort Vermilion in 1809 Henry was reluctant to send hunting parties to the south of the river, "as it would be imprudent to send out a hunting party while they [the Blackfoot] are among us".[29] For a time the Blackfoot supplied enough meat to keep the traders fed, but when fresh meat began to run short Henry sent men to the north to hunt moose and elk even though there were buffalo nearby.[30]

Despite the tensions between the Cree and Blackfoot, Painted Feather camped about twenty five kilometres south of Fort Vermilion--north of some Cree bands--during the winter of 1809-10. Apparently Painted Feather believed his band could camp near these Cree bands without excessive risk. Perhaps he had been able to come to an understanding with these Cree because they wanted to live on the plains as much as he wanted to remain near the trading posts. Perhaps such an agreement included a peaceful trade in horses. On the other hand, Painted Feather's band may have been powerful enough to deter Cree

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[26]Coues, 546.

[27]Coues, 543-4, 548, 552, 557, 574, 587.

[28]Coues, 558.

[29]Coues, 544.

[30]Coues, 545.

aggression.

An incident from the winter of 1810 serves to illustrate the difficulty Feather's band would have in balancing a desire for peace with neighbouring Indians, access to the traders and security for themselves. For several months during the winter of 1809-10 Painted Feather's band gave refuge to three Assiniboine men and their families who had committed murder among their own people. One may have reason to believe that such actions would cause friction between Painted Feather's band and the Assiniboine. Apparently this was not so, for during the winter Painted Feather hosted another party of Assiniboine while he was camped near Fort Vermilion. Curiously, this party of about twenty Assiniboine men was on its way to steal horses at Fort Augustus and Fort Edmonton. Rather than continue the journey to Edmonton, some of this party stole seventy four horses from the Blackfoot. With most of the Blackfoot young men away to war against the Shoshoni, Painted Feather's band appears to have been vulnerable. Painted Feather went to Fort Vermilion to warn the traders that the Assiniboine were on a horse raid against Fort Augustus.[31] Alexander Henry tried to convince the Blackfoot to immediately attempt to reclaim their stolen horses peacefully, "but they did not relish the proposal".[32] Instead Painted Feather's band, aware that the Cree and Assiniboine were planning war against them during the summer, resolved that

> as soon as the snow was gone and their young men returned from war, the Indians below [the Cree and Assiniboine] would feel their anger.... They [Painted Feather's band] had some time ago sent tobacco about to invite the other tribes of the Slaves to assemble on Red Deer river, when they would all in a body go below to find out the Assiniboines and Crees. If the latter should be then inclined to peace, and would return all their and our horses, very well; if otherwise, they would act accordingly.[33]

The North West Company recovered their horses soon afterward without

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[31]Coues, 588-9.

[32]Coues, 590.

[33]Coues, 590.

Blackfoot intervention.[34] In later journal entries Henry did not record the outcome of Painted Feather's plans although he did indicate that the Blood unsuccessfully sought out the Cree that summer.[35] Nevertheless Henry's description portrays Painted Feather as a man who sought bloodless solutions in his conflicts with the Cree and Assiniboine. Even if he could not recover his horses without a show of force he apparently hoped force of numbers would convince the Assiniboine to give up their plunder without inciting them to violent confrontation. As Painted Feather's bands were the most eastern bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy they would have been the frontier bands most likely to meet the Cree and Assiniboine, and as a result, were more vulnerable to their horse raids and other acts of violence. No Blackfoot band had more reason to seek peace between the two peoples.

While the traders tried to remain neutral in conflicts among Indians the incident described above reveals how difficult this could be. Whatever actions traders took they could not avoid seeming to favour one Indian group over another. They increasingly came to fear that they themselves would become the targets of Indian attack. Fur traders had taken precautions since they first came to the region. All posts along the North Saskatchewan River were built on the north side of the river or on an island. Most Cree at this time would approach the forts from the north side of the river. Meanwhile the Plains people would approach from the south. They would either cross the river on horses or have the traders ferry them across. In this way they were encouraged to camp on the south side of the river and cross to the posts only for the purposes of trade.

The North West Company initially hoped each tribal grouping could be persuaded to visit a particular post. Fort Augustus was intended to

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[34]Coues, 591.

[35]Coues, 568.

service the Cree, Assiniboine and Sarcee while Buckingham House was intended to serve the other Plains Indians.[36] Rocky Mountain House, originally built to attract the Kootenay, evolved into a fort intended to draw only the Peigan.[37] These efforts to separate the different Indians met with little success.

As incidents between the Cree and Assiniboine and the Blackfoot Confederacy became more common, traders seem to have become more apprehensive. The traders rightly judged that they were in danger. Individuals and groups among the Cree and the Assiniboine as well as the Blackfoot preyed upon them.[38] The traders began to believe that they would soon become victims of a concerted attack from one group of Indians or another.

As a result, the North West Company and the Hudson's Bay Company consolidated their posts to reduce their risks. In 1810 the Companies agreed to abandon the Fort Vermilion and Paint River House complex at the confluence of the Vermilion and North Saskatchewan Rivers and the Edmonton House and Fort Augustus complex at the site of present-day Edmonton. Instead the Companies built posts at the point where White Earth Creek enters the North Saskatchewan River a few kilometres southeast of present-day Smoky Lake, Alberta, near the northernmost bend in the North Saskatchewan River. Alexander Henry described the reason for the move:

> Mr. Hughes and myself determined to abandon both Fort Vermillion and Fort Augustus, and to build Terre Blanche. The latter, being a more central place, will answer the same purpose as the two present establishments and save the expense of one of them; it will also draw all the Slaves to trade at one place, where we can better defend ourselves from their insults.[39]

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[36]Morton, 77-8. Evidence suggests that the Hudson's Bay Company had similar ambitions for the posts, Johnson, 75n.

[37]Johnson, lxxii.

[38]see Coues, 576, 589.

[39]Coues, 584-5.

Henry also suggested that they could build outposts for several Assiniboine and Cree bands: "by this means we hope to divide the Slaves from the Crees; if it succeeds, it may save us a great deal of trouble and anxiety".[40]

The establishment of the new forts at White Earth Creek may have reduced the threat of Indian attack but the location of the posts does not appear to have been convenient for the Blackfoot. In the two years that the posts at White Earth Creek operated, the traders noted that Blackfoot trading parties travelled four or more days on their way to the post. Furthermore James Bird reported that in 1810-11 the prairies between the Red Deer River and the South Saskatchewan were burnt, preventing many buffalo from moving to the North Saskatchewan River area.[41] Thus the Blackfoot spent the winter well south of the post. Unusually heavy snowfall further discouraged the Blackfoot from making the trip to the post and post employees from collecting meat from their camps.[42] When the Blackfoot did come in to trade, their practice of driving buffalo away from the proximity of Cree camps reduced the ability of the Cree to supply the posts.[43] The 1811-12 winter proved no better for the traders. Mild weather apparently caused the buffalo, and therefore the Blackfoot, to spend the winter near the South Saskatchewan River.[44] Bird reported that the Blackfoot fared so well there, that they could not be bothered to carry a significant supply of provisions or wolves northward.[45] As a consequence the traders were forced to

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[40]Coues, 585.

[41]HBCA B. 60/a.9, December 19, 1810.

[42]HBCA B. 60/a.9, December 19, 1810, January 31, 1811, February 9, 1811, February 18, 1811, April 17, 1811.

[43]HBCA B. 60/a.9, February 9, 1811.

[44]HBCA B. 60/a.10, January 5, 1812.

[45]HBCA B. 60/a.10, January 5, 1812.

subsist on low rations while at White Earth House.[46] Within three years posts were reestablished at the site of today's Edmonton and at Paint River.[47] Journals of the following years contain repeated references to bloodshed between the Cree and Assiniboine and the Blackfoot, Blood, Peigan and Sarcee. Apparently relations among various groups remained acrimonious throughout the era.

In these turbulent times Painted Feather and Gros Blanc appear to have attempted to maintain their earlier patterns of trading behaviour. While there is little record of the activities of either Painted Feather or Gros Banc during this time Alexander Henry the Younger provided a characterization of all of the "Slave Indians" in 1809:

> Painted Feather's band are the most civilized, and well disposed toward us. The Cold band are notoriously a set of audacious villains. The Bloods are still worse, always inclined to mischief and murder. The Piegans are the most numerous and best disposed toward us of all the Indians in the plains. They also kill beaver.[48]

The division of the Blackfoot into two groups survived into the era of intensifying warfare. As well, the policies of both Blackfoot leaders and their bands toward the traders and neighbouring Indians apparently remained relatively constant during this period. Painted Feather had a reputation as a man who sought cooperative and friendly relations with both traders and neighbouring Indians. Gros Blanc maintained his reputation as a "troublesome" Indian.

Henry's appraisal is difficult to interpret further because he did not explain what he meant by "most civilized" or "best disposed". Henry explained that the Peigan had become the only regular suppliers of beaver in the Blackfoot Confederacy. It is probably for this reason that he identified them as the Indians that were "best disposed" towards

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[46]HBCA B. 60/a.9, December 19, 1810.

[47]Posts at present-day Edmonton were reestablished in 1812. Paint River House and Fort Vermilion were likely reestablished the same year although they may have been reestablished a year earlier or later.

[48]Coues, 530.

the traders. Painted Feather's band was dubbed the most civilized. Henry did not elaborate on the distinction. He was probably alluding to this band's particularly friendly and peaceful relations with traders and other Indians. That Painted Feather continued his cooperative policy to his death is confirmed by James Bird's characterization of Feathers upon his death in 1814:

> This Chief was always iminently [sic] instrumental in preserving peace between the Southward Indians and Stone Indians, and those of his own Nation and their Allies; he was also the firm friend of white men and as he possessed much influence his Death may be of more than ordinary consequence in this River.[49]

Feathers was perhaps the most important peace broker in the entire district. The death of an Indian was rarely mentioned in Hudson's Bay Company post journals. Considering the unstable circumstances in 1814, traders had every reason to note the passing of Feathers.

Only one reference in any way connects Feathers with any violence against the traders. This reference which appears in David Thompson's notebooks, is unclear:

> About 2 or 3 months ago the brother of Old White Swan, a Blackfoot chief, had with his band, a party of Blood Indians, and a few Fall Indians, pillaged Fort Augustus and left the men without even clothing on their backs, but whether they murdered the men or not they do not know, any more than whether they pillage both forts or only one, but they were possessed of many guns, much ammunition and tobacco, with various other articles, and finding themselves thus rich, they were gone to war on the Crow Mountain Indians.[50]

The report was probably false in almost all aspects. This entry in Thompson's note book is dated September 25, 1807. On that date he was at Kootenay House, on the west side of the Rocky Mountains.[51] His information appears to have been based on sketchy preliminary reports. There is no other information about such an attack in any other document. Edmonton House documents do not indicate that traders had to rebuild or repair the fort in 1807. Furthermore, Painted Feather was

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[49]HBCA B. 60/a.13, October 27, 1814.

[50]Glover, 311n.

[51]Glover, 276.

well received in 1808 by Alexander Henry. It is not unlikely that a party of Indians destroyed the buildings at the old Fort Augustus site which had been abandoned since 1802. If there had been an attack on the occupied site there would certainly be other references to it.

Even if the report was false it raises some interesting questions. It is interesting that a brother of Old White Swan would be connected with a rumour of violence. It suggests that this man might be so inclined. But who was this brother of Old White Swan? Was he a brother of the chief who died in 1794, or a brother of Painted Feather? In either case it is possible that Old White Swan's brother was Gros Blanc. This would have made Gros Blanc a brother or uncle of Painted Feather. Unfortunately the available evidence only allows us to acknowledge the possibility.

Despite Henry's helpful descriptions of the Blackfoot, it is difficult to determine how Gros Blanc or his band behaved between 1805 and 1814. Henry's journals contain the only direct references to Gros Blanc during this period. They contain most unfavourable characterizations of Gros Blanc and the Cold band. These passages reveal that Gros Blanc and his band continued to follow a confrontational trade strategy, but the journals provide no specific examples of how he and his band earned this reputation. Although Henry recounted several examples of troublesome Blackfoot behaviour he did not explicitly connect such behaviour to this band. Thus conclusions about Gros Blanc's or the Cold band's behaviour during this time period must be tentative. The fact that Gros Blanc was mentioned less often than Painted Feather in Henry's journal, and the fact that their are no references to him in the Hudson's Bay Company documents of the time suggest that Gros Blanc continued to minimize his involvement in the fur trade. It is impossible to discover how increased antagonism with the Cree and Assiniboine affected his band.

Henry's appraisal of the "Slave Indians" provides a clue that the

Cold band may have had a close association with the Blood. Henry noted elsewhere that the Cold Band and the Blood were neighbours and he described them in similar terms. On many occasions between 1794 and 1814 journals note the arrival of combined Blackfoot-Blood trading parties. It is rare that traders noted which band of Blackfoot accompanied the Blood. Henry's journals suggest that the Cold band and not the Painted Feather's band accompanied the Blood. This was the case in 1794 at Fort George. On other occasions such combined parties were described as being troublesome while at the trading posts. In the latter part of 1809 Henry noted that the Cold band had moved toward Fort Augustus after they had quarrelled with Painted Feather's band.[52] Soon afterward he reported that a party of "Slave" Indians "behaved rascally" at Fort Augustus and had pillaged two North West Company men on the plains. He continued by observing that "the Cold band and Bloods appear the most maliciously inclined toward us."[53] Henry was clearly implying that the Cold band and some Blood bands had participated in these actions. Perhaps Gros Blanc's influence as an agitator extended beyond the Cold band.

There is also some evidence that Gros Blanc could be the focus of Cree hostility at posts on the North Saskatchewan as he had been the focus of Atsina hostility at Chesterfield House. He had clearly been the focus of Cree animosity at Fort George in 1794 because he had killed a Cree.[54] The evidence from 1809 is much less clear. Henry noted that Gros Blanc arrived at Fort Vermilion on September 17, 1809. At that time a large number of both the Painted Feather's band and the Cold band had already been at the fort for several days. Curiously though, it is on September 17, soon after Gros Blanc arrived, that Henry wrote: "I

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[52]Coues, 572.

[53]Coues, 578.

[54]Morton, 45.

sent off my Cree interpreter...to a camp of Cree in the strong woods, to desire them not to come near us for some days, as I apprehended danger from the Slaves, who appeared inveterate against them."[55] Henry did not indicate that Gros Blanc's arrival induced him to send this message to the Cree; the coincidental comments merely suggest it.

Fort Vermilion and the Hudson's Bay Company's Paint River House were located at the confluence of the Vermilion (Paint) River and the North Saskatchewan River, about thirty kilometres downstream from the abandoned Buckingham House and Fort George complex. Evidently Cree bands camped in areas south of Fort Vermilion as far as the Battle River during these two seasons.[56] Blackfoot bands that wished to camp near Fort Vermilion would be in frequent contact with Cree bands. It appears that Painted Feather's band camped near Fort Vermilion during the winters of 1808-09 and 1809-10. Evidence from the first winter is inconclusive. Henry's journal for that season ends abruptly on September 17 with the summary, "Here I passed the winter, during which nothing occurred by the routine of trade."[57] It seems that, rather than record the mundane details of life at Fort Vermilion, Henry chose to insert a description of the various Indians that traded at Fort Vermilion. Henry's summary of Blackfoot beliefs, apparently written during that winter, contains information provided by Painted Feather. In order to have provided such information, Painted Feather would have to have been at least an occasional visitor. Evidence for the 1809-10 season is much more conclusive. During the 1809-10 season, when Henry kept a more complete journal, Painted Feather's band spent much of the winter pounding buffalo along the Vermilion River, not more than a half

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[55]Coues, 543-4.

[56]Coues, 548, 585.

[57]Coues, 509.

day's journey from Fort Vermilion.[58] During this time members of the band visited the fort frequently.

At Fort Vermilion Painted Feather and his band and the traders developed a very positive relationship. During both the 1808-09 season and the 1809-10 season, Painted Feather's band was at Fort Vermilion when Alexander Henry arrived in September. When Alexander Henry arrived on September 13, 1808 he noted that the Painted Feather's band "began to whoop and halloo as we came down the hills, and appeared rejoiced to see us".[59] The following day James Bird stopped at Paint River House on his way to Fort Edmonton. He noted that the seventeen tents of Blackfoot "behaved in the most friendly manner to Mr. Hallet".[60] During that winter, Henry noted "The Blackfoot have repeatedly sent for my neighbour and me to come to their camp and see buffalo driven into the pound. Painted Feather's brother being here for that purpose, we determined to accompany him,...."[61] Alexander Henry, Henry Hallet and about twenty four of their men spent several days at Painted Feather's camp watching as the Blackfoot attempted to lure buffalo into a pound. In the meantime the traders were treated as honoured guests.[62] Clearly then, traders such as Henry and Hallet had more than a distant commercial relationship with the Painted Feather and his band. Since this was the most "congenial" band of the Blackfoot Confederacy its services and information could have been particularly valuable to the traders.

Painted Feather's band apparently camped near Fort Vermilion in order to act as provisioners. None of the Blackfoot were actually hired as post hunters, but they visited the post often. When Henry visited

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[58]Coues, 576-7

[59]Coues, 506.

[60]HBCA B. 60/a.8, September 14, 1808.

[61]Coues, 576.

[62]Coues, 576-7.

Painted Feather's pound in 1810 his men returned with thirty six cow buffalo.[63] A few Blackfoot from the pound took several more buffalo. Upon arriving at Fort Vermilion in 1808, Henry needed fresh provisions:

> We sent for the principal chief;.... This chief, called Painted Feather, is a man of great authority in his tribe. We desired him to send his young men out to hunt buffalo for our people, which he readily consented to do, giving orders to the camp for a party to set off instantly, as buffalo were at hand.[64]

The Blackfoot hunters returned the following day with ten cows. As was the case in September 1808, Painted Feather's band was at Fort Vermilion when Henry arrived there in September 1809. While there, the Blackfoot provided fresh meat for the traders. Because of tensions between the Cree and the Blackfoot, the Cree were not employed as hunters south of the river.[65] Perhaps Painted Feather or young men of his band harassed Cree hunters in an effort to guard their provisioning role.

Painted Feather was a useful source of intelligence and information for the traders. Since his band was deemed the most trustworthy among the Blackfoot Confederacy traders likely depended on them for news about the Plains Indians. Judging by the accuracy of Painted Feather's news about the Assiniboine horse thieves in 1810, his information appears to have been reliable and valuable. Painted Feather also served to moderate the behaviour of members of his band while they were at the posts. When a Blackfoot quarrelled with Hudson's Bay Company traders at Paint River House Painted Feather intervened and avoided violence.[66]

Evidently, the role which members of Painted Feather's band took on the North Saskatchewan was more limited than the homeguard role which they had assumed at Chesterfield House. The Blackfoot were not employed

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[63]Coues, 578.

[64]Coues, 507.

[65]Coues, 546.

[66]Coues, 545.

as post hunters despite their ability to supply plentiful provisions. Marriages between the Blackfoot and traders were rare although according to their custom some Blackfoot men did offer their wives as occasional bed fellows. As a result there were mixed-blood children among the Blackfoot.[67]

Blackfoot relations with the Cree and Assiniboine changed significantly during the first fifteen years of the nineteenth century. Similarly, relations changed with Indians to the southwest of the Confederacy. Until 1810 the Blackfoot enjoyed military supremacy over the Kootenay, Flathead and Shoshoni. In 1810 the Flathead, bolstered by their first acquisition of significant supplies of guns and ammunition, dared seek buffalo on the western Plains. They were discovered by the Peigan, but the Flathead defeated the Peigan in a skirmish.[68] The Peigan blamed the traders for supplying their enemies with guns and unsuccessfully attempted to stop the flow of European goods over the Rockies. Henry noted that the Peigan were undeterred by their defeats at the hands of the Flathead in 1811, but Thompson indicated that frontier bands of Peigan did sue for peace in 1812..[69] Warfare against Indians to the southwest would continue, but henceforth this enemy would be no easy prey.

The first decade of the nineteenth century brought Americans to the southern edges of Blackfoot territory. The Blackfoot Confederacy would come to count them among their enemies. In 1805-06 Captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark were sent by the American government to explore their recently acquired Louisiana Territory. These men became the first white men to travel to the headwaters of the Missouri River on their way to the Pacific Ocean. On July 26, 1806, while

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[67]Morton, 46; Coues, 577, 722, 735.

[68]Coues, 712-13, Glover, 306.

[69]Coues, 726-27. The Flathead rejected the Peigan offers, Glover, 389-92.

returning from the Pacific, Captain Lewis and three of his men met a band of Peigan camped near the forks of the Marias River. The Americans and Peigan camped together that night. When the Peigan tried to steal some of the Americans' guns the following morning the Americans killed two of them, stole their horses and fled.[70] The incident set the stage for a quarter of a century of hostility between the Blackfoot Confederacy and the "Long Knives" (Americans). Although the Peigan sought revenge for the killings the following summer the incident was not the cause of the continuous hostility. According to American historian Hiram Chittenden, in 1807, American trader Manuel Lisa had a peaceful meeting with "Blackfeet" who were eager to trade with the Americans. According to Chittenden, Lisa arranged for the "Blackfeet" to meet with John Colter (a veteran of the Lewis and Clark expedition) and various Indians at the three forks of the Missouri in the spring of 1808.[71] An Atsina and Blood party reported the meeting to James Bird at Edmonton. They had set off toward the Missouri in order to kill any Americans they could find, but "the Americans they say received them in a very friendly manner, made them presents and invited them to a general meeting next spring with all the Indians they hitherto warred with in order to settle a Peace with them, and for the Purposes of Trade".[72] These Indians showed little interest in a peace with their Indian enemies, but they apparently intended to meet Colter.

The scheduled meeting never took place. In late 1807 a war party of the Blackfoot Confederacy or the Atsina discovered John Colter in the

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[70]Reuben Gold Thwaites, ed., *Original Journals of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, 1804-1806* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), vol. 5, 226. The Peigan version of the incident was recorded by James Bird, HBCA B. 60/a.6, letter from James Bird to John McNab, December 23, 1806.

[71]Hiram Chittenden, *The History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West*. (New York: Francis P. Harper, 1902), 2: 714. Chittenden's use of the term "Blackfeet" includes the entire Blackfoot Confederacy.

[72]HBCA B. 60/a.7, January 21, 1808.

company of their Crow enemies.[73] Colter wisely abandoned his plans to meet the Blackfoot the following spring. Hudson's Bay Company documents and Henry's journals indicate that parties of Blood, Sarcee, Atsina and Blackfoot brought beaver skins and goods plundered from Americans during the summer of 1808.[74]

The Blackfoot Confederacy's hostility to Americans did not arise simply from the Lewis and Clark incident. It arose because the Americans came to the upper Missouri to trap their own furs rather than trade with the Indians, and it arose from the fear that the "Long Knives" would supply their enemies with guns.[75] In 1831 peaceful trade was established between the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Americans only after the Americans expressed their willingness to trade with the Blackfoot Confederacy.[76] Considering Gros Blanc's warlike reputation and his defiant behaviour toward white traders, it is not surprising that his band frequently waged war against Indians to the southwest and against American trappers.

Painted Feather's band continued to wage war to the south and west after Chesterfield House was closed. While it appears that the Painted Feather's band usually spent winters near a fur trade post on the North Saskatchewan River they spent summers as far south as the Missouri River. Even during the winter the young men of the band could be absent for extended periods in order to go to war against the Shoshoni or

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[73]Chittenden, 2: 714-16.

[74]HBCA B. 60/a.8, October 8, 1808, October 12, 1808, October 31, 1808, and Coues, 539-40. Several Americans appear to have been killed in these attacks.

[75]Ewers, "The Influence", 4-5; Ewers, *The Blackfeet Raiders*, 57; Chittenden, 1: 334.

[76]Ewers, *The Blackfeet Raiders*, 57; Chittenden, 1: 330-35.

Crow.[77] Henry also implied that Painted Feather's band waged war on the Americans.[78] There is no reason to believe that Painted Feather's policy of maintaining peaceful relations with traders and neighbouring Indians extended to distant Indians or American trappers. Painted Feather's band focussed aggression at specific groups who were of no immediate strategic interest to them. At best Painted Feather saw Americans as unwelcome intruders, at worst allies of their enemies. This made them either convenient quarry for plunder or enemies to be harassed. With access to British traders on the Saskatchewan there were no circumstances at the moment to encourage the Blackfoot to tolerate their presence.

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[77]For example the young men of Painted Feather's band were at war for several months starting the middle of January 1810, Coues, 588. By the middle of May they had returned after killing several Flathead and stealing two hundred horses, Coues, 598.

[78]Coues, 539.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of Euro-Canadian traders on the western prairies roughly coincided with the deterioration of relations between the Cree and Assiniboine and their Plains Indian neighbours. The traders themselves were not the cause of the collapse of these friendships. Traders encouraged Indians to live together in peace, but they watched relations grow more and more acrimonious. The traders had little ability to influence this trend. In a very real sense they lived and traded at the consent of resident Indians. Surely the Indians could have expelled traders from the North Saskatchewan River region as easily as they expelled trappers from the Missouri River Valley before 1831; however, the Indian peoples near the North Saskatchewan River had a critical interest in having the fur traders stay. It was from this fact that the traders derived their limited influence on the prairies.

Ironically, while traders had little direct influence on Indian behaviour on the northern prairies between 1794 and 1815, fur trade posts and military hardware were of critical importance. The environs of the fur trade posts were the meeting place of diverse Indians. As many as three fur trade companies could compete at any one site. Bands from five or more Indian peoples could visit a post. Naturally a band's relations with other bands, and to a lesser degree with the traders, determined its security of access to guns and ammunition. A band's ability to control the territory around a post gave it a distinct advantage over others. Geographical position, long-standing friendships, kin relationships and mutuality of interests ensured that the Cree and their Assiniboine allies became the most important partners of Euro-Canadian traders. By virtue of this relationship Cree bands enjoyed the upper hand in power relations with other Indian bands. Bands of the Blackfoot Confederacy and the Atsina may have had larger horse herds than the Cree, but they held "junior" roles in the trade. Fur trade posts were generally on the northern edge of their

territories. Their access to guns and ammunition was less secure. Still more distant bands to the south and west, the Kootenay, Shoshoni, Flathead and Crow, had infrequent access to European goods for most of this period. As a result the Blackfoot Confederacy was able to dominate the northern prairies.

For the Plains Indian bands who held a peripheral role in the fur trade it was critically important to secure access to guns and ammunition. With European weapons they could maintain their military superiority over their enemies to the south and west and resist pressure from Cree bands. Strategies for maintaining access to European goods became a critical concern among these people. There was not one "Plains Indian response" to these challenges. Indeed, there was not one "Blackfoot response". Each Indian band chose its own course. Among the Blackfoot between 1794 and 1815 two groups of residential bands came to follow the examples of two preeminent leaders. These two regional bands chose very different trade strategies. One group, probably composed of bands which had the first direct contact with traders, sought to ensure secure access to European goods through cooperative relations with neighbouring Indian groups and with traders. Feathers was not the author of this strategy but he became its most prominent representative between 1794 and 1815. He and his band developed such a level of trust between themselves and the traders that the traders were willing to establish Chesterfield House within Blackfoot territory. There Feathers's band provided important services for the traders. In return the Blackfoot had secure access to European goods that would have rivalled that of Cree homeguard bands. Although Atsina attacks led the traders to abandon Chesterfield House in 1802, Painted Feather maintained a particularly close relationship with the traders and sought peaceful relations with the Cree and the Assiniboine. As long as Painted Feather's band could maintain peaceful relations with Cree and Assiniboine bands, their access to European goods was secure.

Gros Blanc, the leader of the other group of Blackfoot bands, adopted a more aggressive policy toward the traders and the Cree. Perhaps the band's involvement in attacks on traders before 1794 made this course their only choice. Fur traders remembered such attacks. While the traders were willing to trade with Gros Blanc's band and the Atsina less than a year after they attacked trading posts, they continued to distrust them for many years. Therefore they would not be as generous in their gift-giving and would be reluctant to turn to them to provide various services. Furthermore, neighbouring Cree bands could threaten the Cold band's security in the environs of trading posts. Gros Blanc's group of bands successfully used theft, intimidation, and relentless bargaining to increase their fur trade returns. Contentious relationships with traders and neighbouring Indians forced the band to camp well away from fur trade posts, to visit posts less frequently and to travel to the post in larger parties, but they rarely lost access to European wares. Gros Blanc did not want to drive traders out of the upper North Saskatchewan River region. He understood the critical importance of European goods to his own people. He also understood to a degree what brought the traders to Blackfoot country. He was confident that his actions would not end his access to European goods.

The importance of European military hardware meant that any group that attacked the traders would feel the hostility of other Indians. Those Indians who enjoyed the greatest advantages because of their access to European goods were the most likely to defend nearby trading posts. The Cree and Assiniboine attacked the Atsina after they had attacked Manchester House and South Branch House in 1793 and 1794. The Blackfoot threatened them after they attacked traders near Chesterfield House in 1802. At the same time a group that had uncertain access to trading posts were the most likely to attack them. The Atsina attacked the traders because of a shortage of military hardware which had rendered them incapable of withstanding Cree and Assiniboine aggression.

The Atsina attacks of 1793, 1794 and 1802 stemmed from an Atsina perception of their own vulnerability.

Historical literature of the last thirty years has begun to uncover the important impact which Indian groups had on fur trade history. General histories of specific Indian peoples have also shed light on how they responded to the opportunities and challenges that arose because of the fur trade but fail to discuss how Indians responded at a band or individual level. This study of the Blackfoot bands' response to the traders reveals something to the complexity of interethnic relations on the northern plains in this era. Each residential band experienced its own set of challenges, and each band, guided by its own leadership, responded to them. More research is required before these responses are fully understood. Studies of prominent but hitherto overlooked Blackfoot leaders such as Feathers and Big Man, Atsina leaders such as "L'Homme de Callumet" and A kas kin, and Peigan leaders such as Sakatow, Kootanae Appe, and "Black Bear" are essential to clearer understandings of this period in the history of the northern plains peoples.

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